SAMURAI EXECUTIONER

首斬り朝

VOLUME 5 TEN FINGERS, ONE LIFE

By KAZUO KOIKE & GOSEKI KOJIMA

首斬り朝

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Punished is not the man himself,
but the evil that resides in him.

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TEN FINGERS, ONE LIFE

By KAZUO KOIKE
& GOSEKI KOJIMA

VOLUME

5

A NOTE TO READERS

Samurai Executioner is a carefully researched re-creation of Edo-Period Japan. To preserve the flavor of the work, we have chosen to retain many Edo-Period terms that have no direct equivalents in English. Japanese is written in a mix of Chinese ideograms and a syllabic writing system, resulting in numerous synonyms. In the glossary, you may encounter words with multiple meanings. These are words written with Chinese ideograms that are pronounced the same but carry different meanings. A Japanese reader seeing the different ideograms would know instantly which meaning it is, but these synonyms can cause confusion when Japanese is spelled out in our alphabet. *O-yurushi o* (please forgive us)!

SAMURAI EXECUTIONER 首斬り朝

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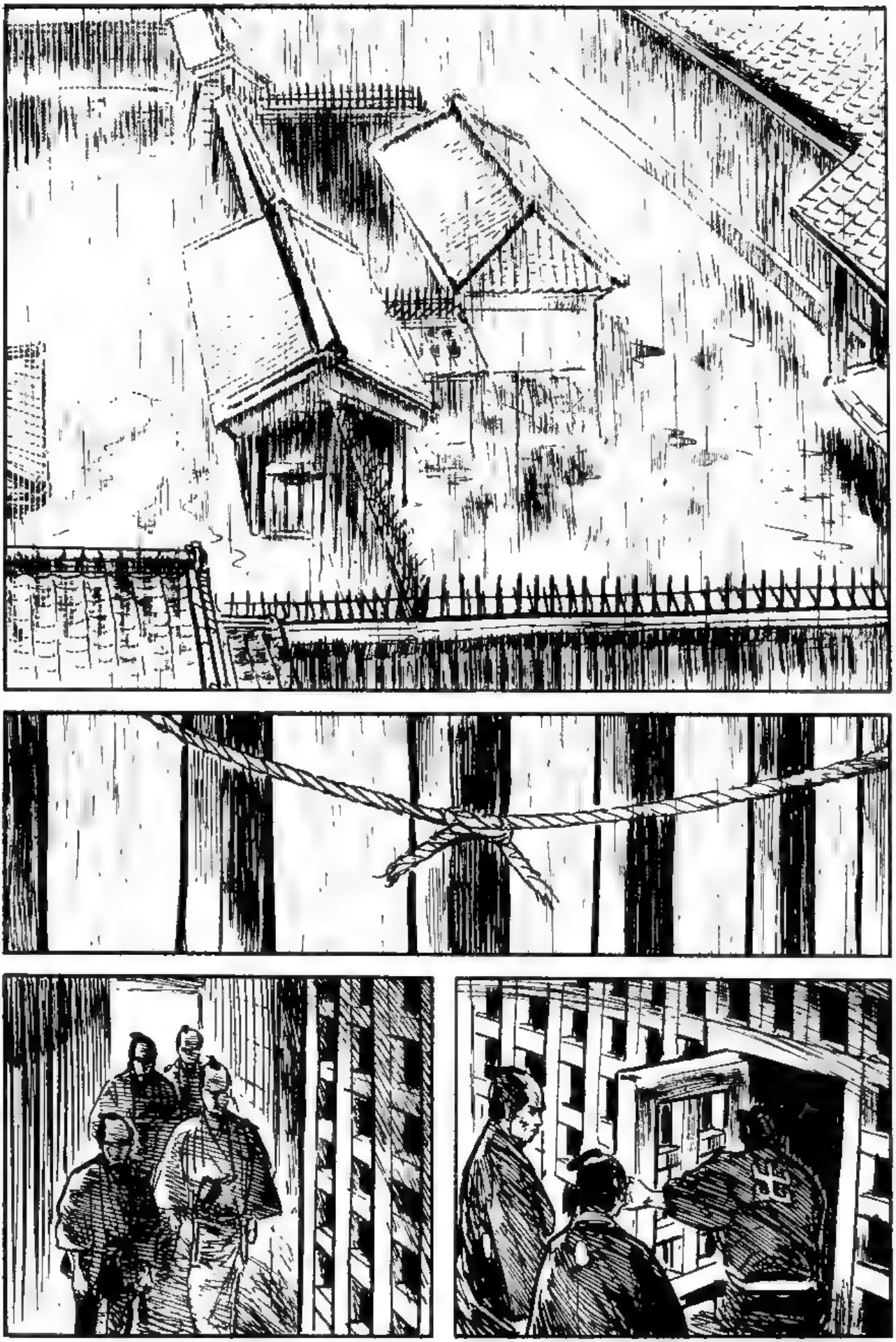
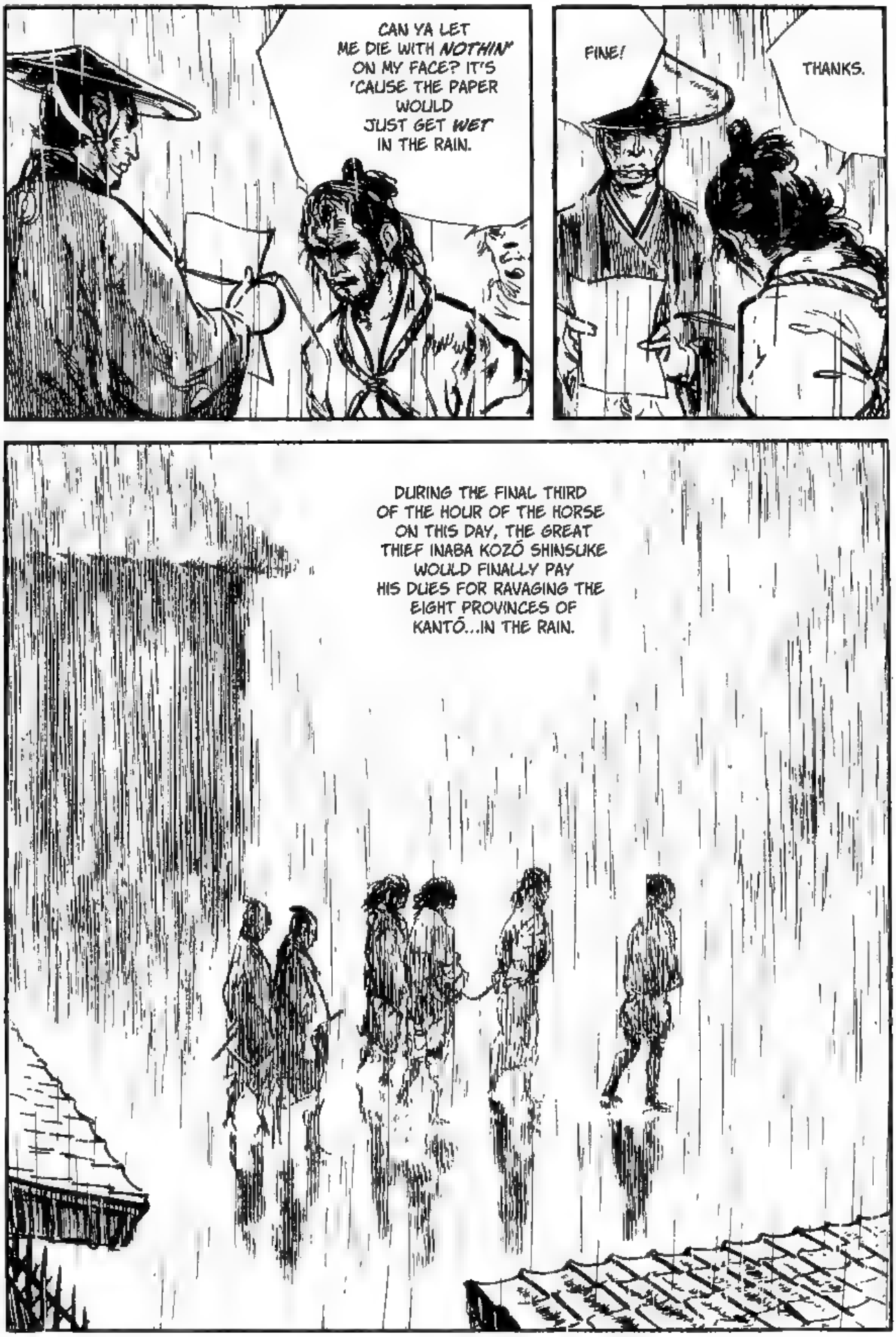
the sixteenth

Ten fingers, One life



YOU MUST BE INABA KOZŌ SHINSUKE, A.K.A. HOMELESS SHINSUKE OF BUSHŪ.
YUP.


CAN YA LET ME DIE WITH *NOTHIN'* ON MY FACE? IT'S 'CAUSE THE PAPER WOULD JUST GET *WET* IN THE RAIN.
FINE!
THANKS.
DURING THE FINAL THIRD OF THE HOUR OF THE HORSE ON THIS DAY, THE GREAT THIEF INABA KOZŌ SHINSUKE WOULD FINALLY PAY HIS DUES FOR RAVAGING THE EIGHT PROVINCES OF KANTŌ...IN THE RAIN.

THANK YOU.

IF YOU HAVE ANY LAST WORDS, I'LL *LISTEN*.
YAMADA-*SAMA*... WHEN PEOPLE DIE, DO THEY KEEP THEIR HANDS *OPEN*...
...OR DO THEY KEEP 'EM *CLOSED*?
I'VE KILLED A *LOTTA* PEOPLE IN MY TIME. MAYBE NOT AS MANY AS *YOU*, YAMADA-*SAMA*, BUT...
MEN, WOMEN, YOUNG, OR OLD, WHEN THEY DIED, THEY *ALL* CLENCHED THEIR FISTS. NOT *ONE* KEPT THEIR PALMS OPEN.

WHAT WERE THEY TRYIN' TO HOLD ONTO WHEN THEY DIED? THEIR LOVED ONES?
OR THE MONEY THEY COULDN'T TAKE WITH 'EM TO HELL?
OR ALL THE MANY THINGS THEY WANTED OUTTA LIFE BUT NEVER GOT TO HAVE?
OR THE FLAMES OF THEIR LIVES ABOUT TO GO OUT?
IS IT 'CAUSE THEY'RE LIKE SOMEBODY DROWNIN', GRABBIN' ONTO A STRAW FOR DEAR LIFE?
JUST *WHAT* IS IT, I WONDER.
THE STUFF WE CAN GRAB WITH OUR TEN FINGERS AIN'T WORTH MUCH.
BUT THERE AIN'T NO LIMIT TO IT. THAT'S WHY WE GOTTA LEARN WHEN TO GIVE UP.

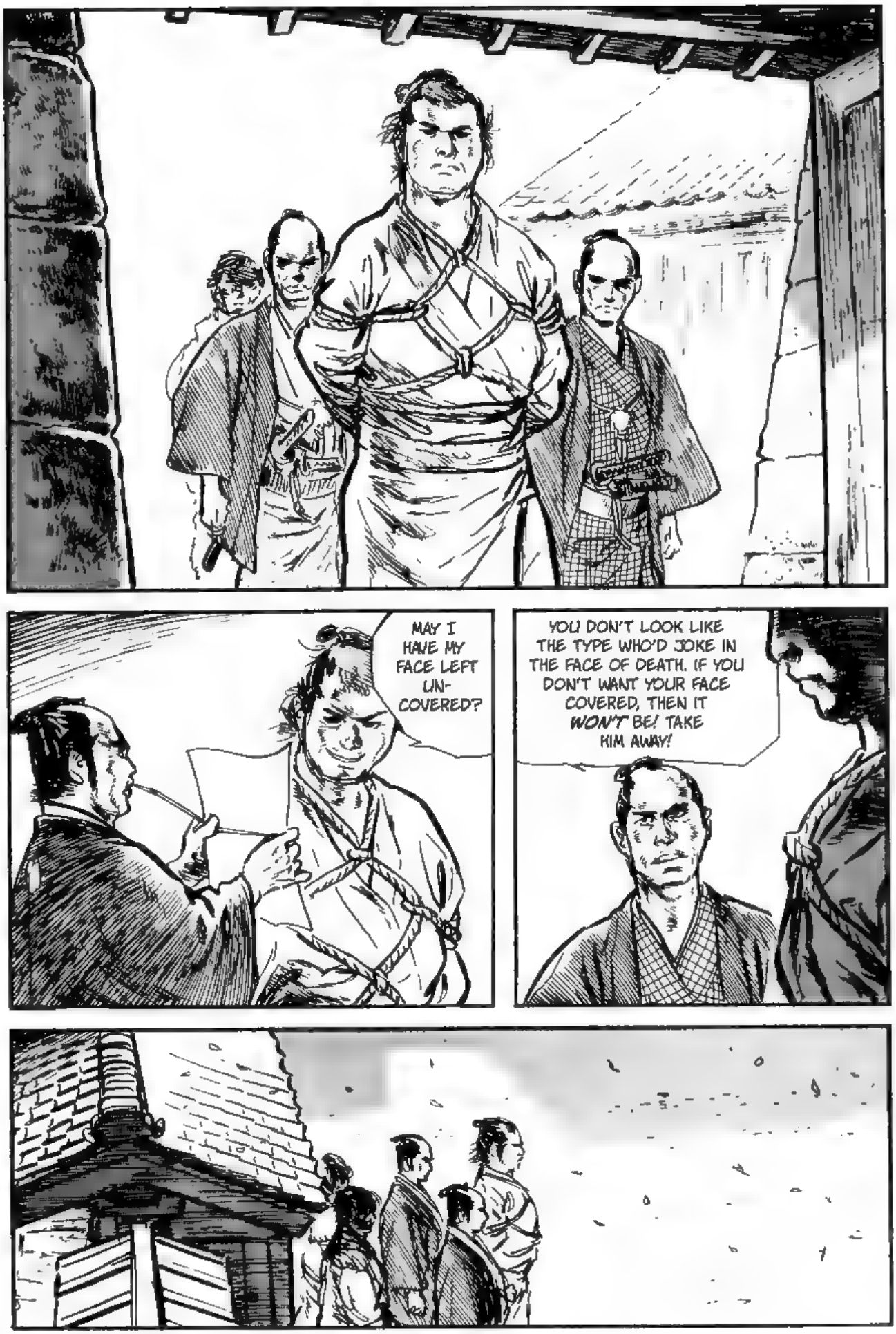
MAYBE IT'S 'CAUSE OF THE STARS WE'RE BORN UNDER.
THAT'S WHY WHEN WE DIE, WE CAN'T JUST GIVE UP OUR DESIRES AND GO RIGHT INTO THE UNDERWORLD.
Y'KNOW, YAMADA-*SAMA*, WHEN I DECIDED I WAS GONNA LIVE IT UP WHILE I COULD, I PREPARED MYSELF FOR THE DAY WHEN I'D END UP *HERE*.
BASICALLY, I WAS GONNA DO EVERYTHIN' I EVER WANTED BEFORE I WENT TO HELL.
I SNATCHED MONEY AND HAD MY FILL OF LUXURY. I CHASED AFTER SO MANY WOMEN THAT I GOT *SICK* OF 'EM. I LIVED MY LIFE WITHOUT *ANY* REGRETS. I'M *SATISFIED*.
I AIN'T PUTTIN' ON NO SHOW. THIS IS HOW I *REALLY* FEEL.
YAMADA-*SAMA*, I THINK YOU'VE KILLED A *LOTTA* PEOPLE. WAS THERE *EVER* SOMEBODY WHO LEFT THEIR HANDS OPEN WHEN THEY DIED?
NOT ONE.

ANYWAY, I JUST WANTED TO ASK...
PLEASE CUT THE ROPE.
SNIP
SNIP
I AIN'T HOLDIN' ONTO *NOTHIN'*.
I'M GONNA DIE *CONTENT*.
THAT'S WHY *I'M* GONNA GO TO HELL WITH MY HANDS *WIDE OPEN*.

WATCH. I'M GONNA BE THE *FIRST* GUY TO DIE WITH HIS FINGERS SPREAD OUT.
SO CUT MY HEAD OFF *REAL NICE*, OK?

I CAN *END* LIVES, BUT I CAN'T *HOLD* THEM.
NO ONE CAN HOLD ONTO THEIR OWN LIFE. NOT EVEN *ME*.
THEY HAVE *TEN* FINGERS, BUT ONLY *ONE* LIFE.
THAT'S WHY PEOPLE CLENCH THEIR FISTS WHEN THEY'RE ABOUT TO DIE...

the seventeenth "Matta"


MAY I HAVE MY FACE LEFT UN-COVERED?
YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE THE TYPE WHO'D JOKE IN THE FACE OF DEATH. IF YOU DON'T WANT YOUR FACE COVERED, THEN IT *WON'T* BE! TAKE KIM AWAY!

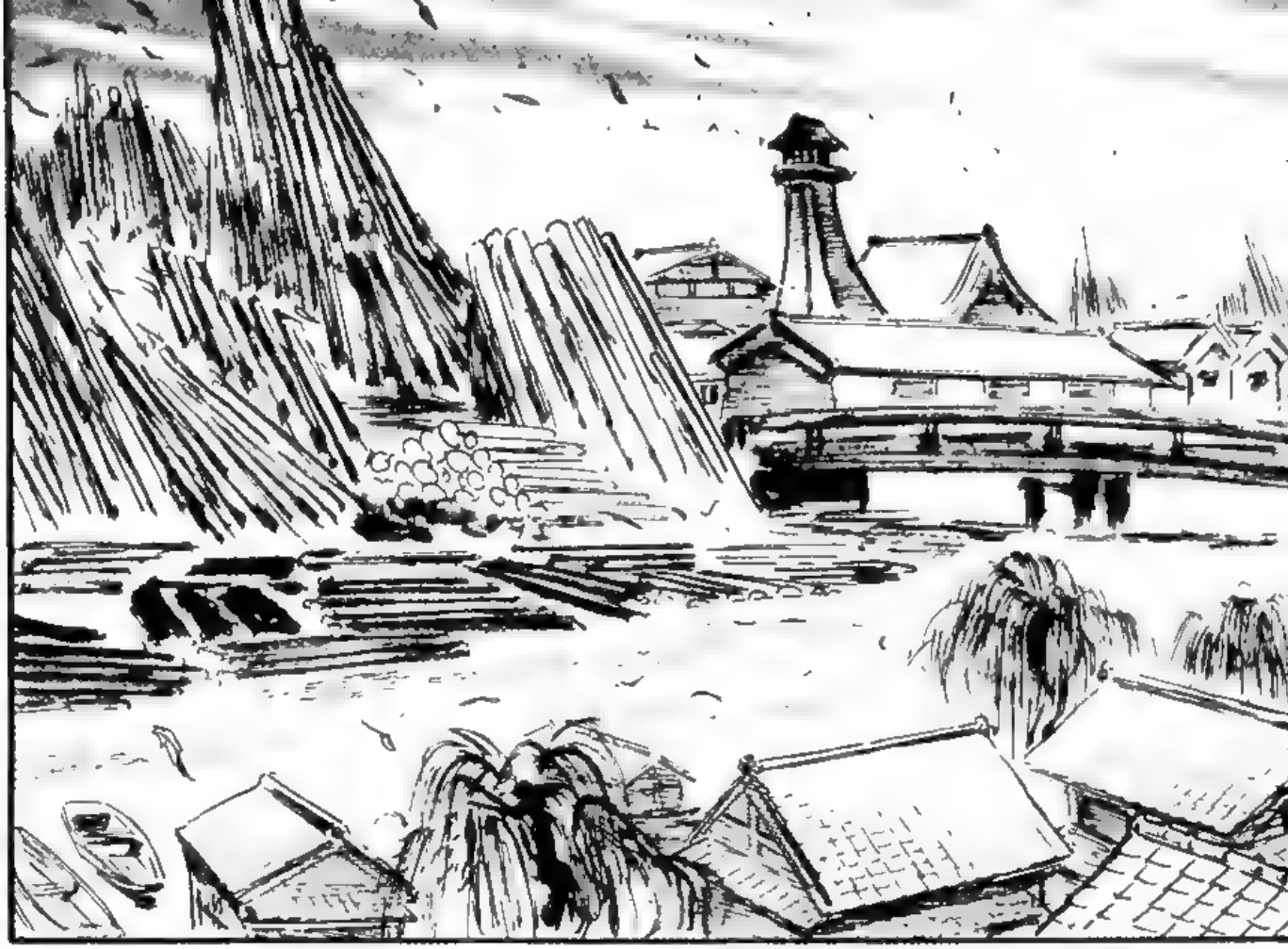
SNIP
SNIP

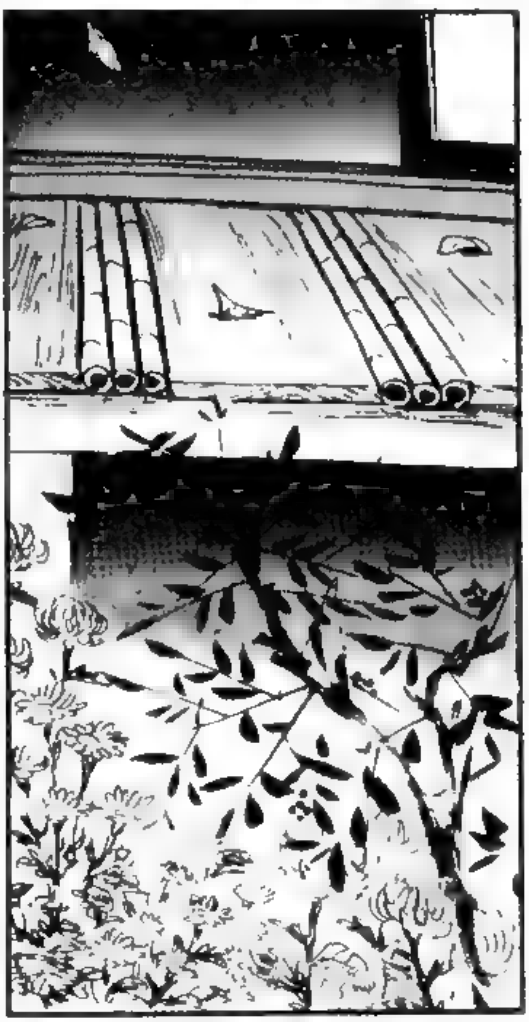
MATTA!
KUHHL

I'M SORRY. NOW I'VE GOT NO REGRETS!
WHOOSH!

WHY?
北町奉行所
OFFICE OF THE NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER

HACHIZŌ THE CICADA AND...
HERE'S THE GUY YOU MENTIONED-- HOMELESS HACHIZŌ OF YASHO
HE HAS ONE RELA-TIVE...
UH, A YOUNGER SISTER, O-RAKU, TWENTY-SIX.
SHE'S A SELF-EMPLOYED GEISHA.
HER WORKING NAME'S THE SAME.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR TROUBLE.
I'M VERY GRATEFUL.
I SUPPOSE THAT HACHIZŌ...
I EXECUTED HIM THIS MORNING.





EXCUSE ME.
I'M O-RAKU, AND...?!
I'M SORRY TO DISTURB YOU, BUT I HAVE SOMETHING I'D LIKE TO ASK YOU.
I AM YAMADA ASAEMON.

TH-THEN MY BROTHER...
I BEHEADED HIM THIS MORNING.
OHHH...
JUST AS I WAS ABOUT TO SWING MY SWORD DOWN...
HE CRIED OUT, "MATTA!"
HE SCREAMED IT AT THE TOP OF HIS LUNGS. IT WAS TERRIFYING.
"MATTA!"

EVEN THOUGH IT LASTED FOR JUST A MOMENT, MY WHOLE BODY FROZE UP, AND I COULDN'T MOVE!
UP UNTIL NOW, I'VE KILLED HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE WHO DIED SCREAMING. BUT I'VE NEVER HEARD ANYTHING LIKE THAT BEFORE.
WHY DID HE DO IT?
I WANTED TO KNOW. I THOUGHT HIS RELATIVES MIGHT HAVE THE ANSWER, SO I CAME HERE TO FIND YOU.
EVEN IF HE CRIED OUT "MATTA!" TO TELL ME TO WAIT BEFORE EXECUTING HIM, HE DIDN'T DO SO OUT OF FEAR--OUT OF AN ATTACHMENT TO HIS LIFE. NO, IT WAS SOMETHING ELSE ENTIRELY THAT STRUCK MY EARS.
THAT'S WHY I SHUDDERED.
IF YOU KNOW, CAN'T YOU TELL ME?
S-SO THAT'S WHAT HAPPENED...
MY BROTHER...
...CRIED OUT "MATTA!" AT THE LAST MOMENT... OHHH...

MY BROTHER WAS A SUMO WRESTLER.
HE NEVER MADE ANY FALSE STARTS.
A WRESTLER WHO NEVER MADE ANY FALSE STARTS?!
HIS NAME AS A WRESTLER WAS HACHIMENZAN. HE USED THAT UP TO THE TIME HE BECAME A SEKIWAKE.

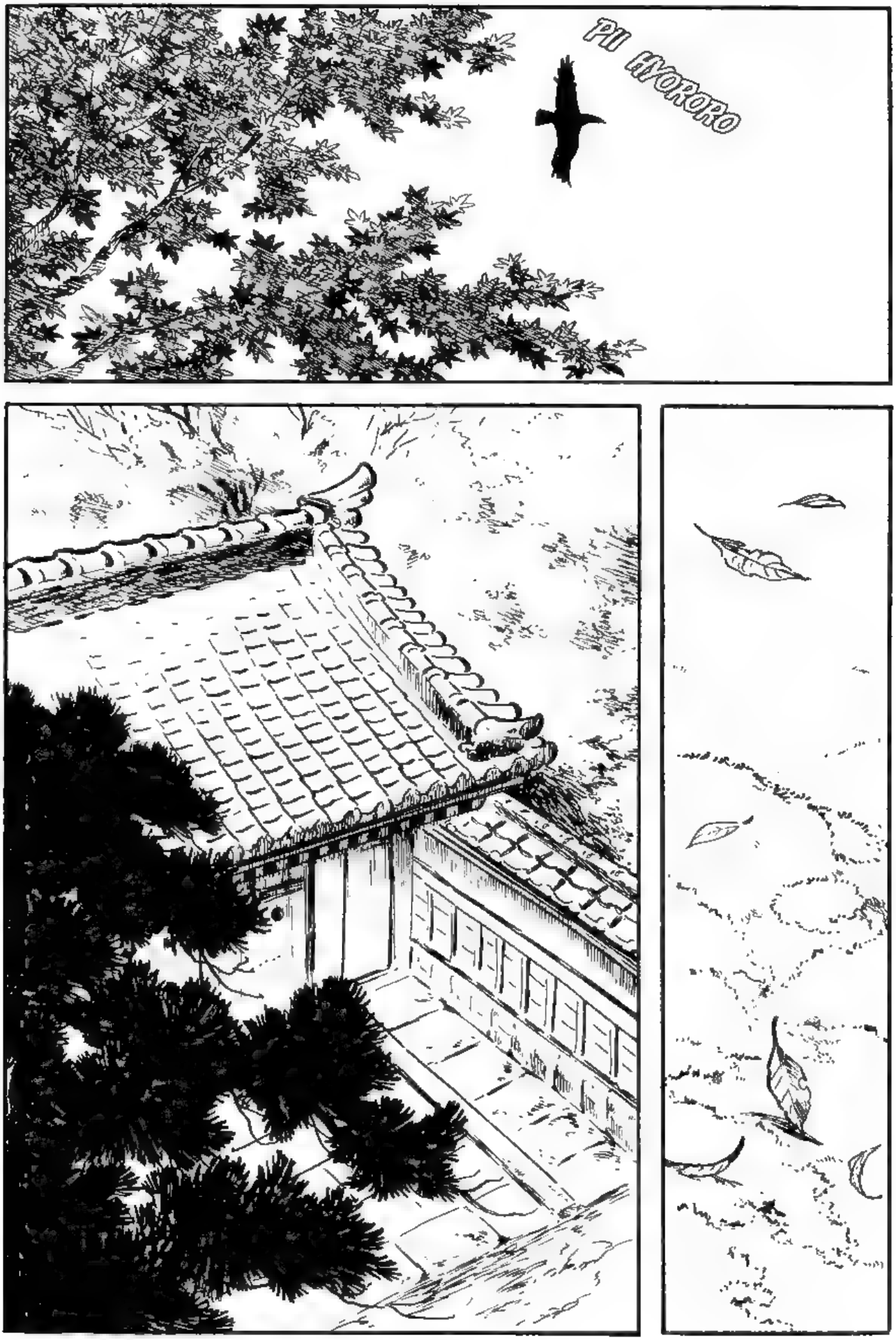
MY BROTHER WAS *REMARKABLY* STRONG.
HE BECAME THE *HINOSHITA KAIZAN YOKOZUNA* WITHOUT *ANY* OBJECTIONS.
HE WAS *PURE* AND *MANLY* IN SPIRIT.
NO MATTER WHAT, HE NEVER ACCUSED ANYONE OF *MATTA*.

THE OTHER WRESTLERS *KNEW* HIS PERSONALITY AND TOOK ADVANTAGE OF HIM.
HIS STRENGTH MADE THEM *ENVIOUS*--AND EVEN *HOSTILE!*
THEY ACCUSED HIM OF *MATTA* OVER AND OVER AGAIN, ENRAGING HIM. THEIR LIES CAUSED HIM TO LOSE INTEREST IN SUMO.
ALTHOUGH HE WAS *YOKOZUNA*, HE RECEIVED *THIRTY-FOUR* ACCUSATIONS OF *MATTA*.
DESPITE THAT, HE HAD *NEVER* MADE A SINGLE FALSE START.

IN THE END, HE *GAVE UP* SUMO AND *DESTROYED* HIMSELF...BY TURNING TO *CRIME*...
OHHH...
OH...COULD MY BROTHER HAVE WANTED TO CRY OUT "*MATTA*"...JUST ONCE IN HIS LIFE... BEFORE HE DIED?
OHHH...
WAS "*MATTA*" THE CRY OF A MAN WHO WANTED TO LIVE JUST A LITTLE BIT LONGER?

the eighteenth

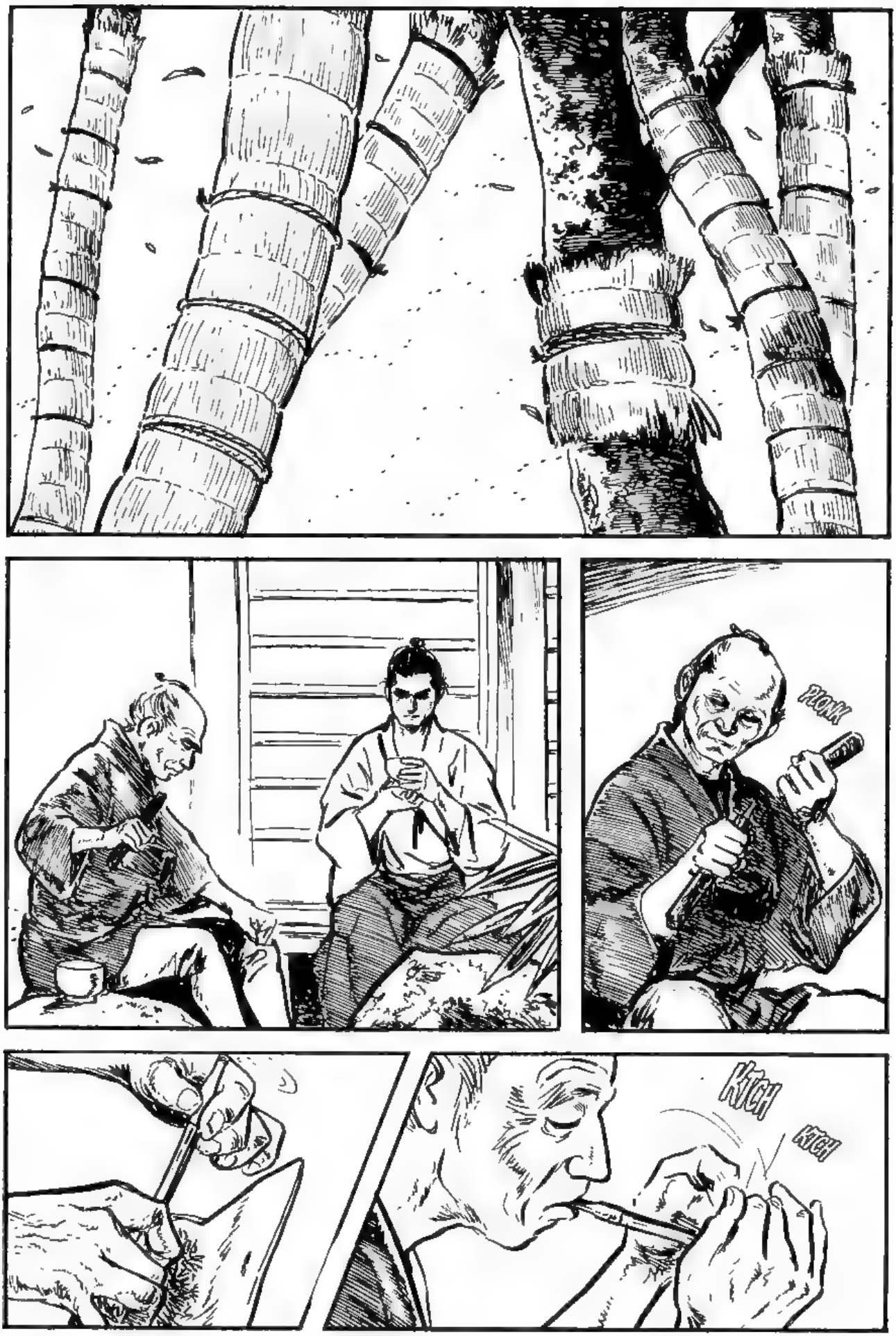
A puff of life


PII HYORORO

Cuuu,

I'LL DO IT.
I DON'T MIND.
EVERYONE SHOULD DO SOME WORK EVERY DAY.

THEY SHOULDN'T SIT STILL FOR LONG.
AFTER EVERY MEAL, I *ALWAYS* MUST WALK AROUND MY GARDEN.
LIKE *THIS!*
I'M SORRY.


PONK
KICH
KICH

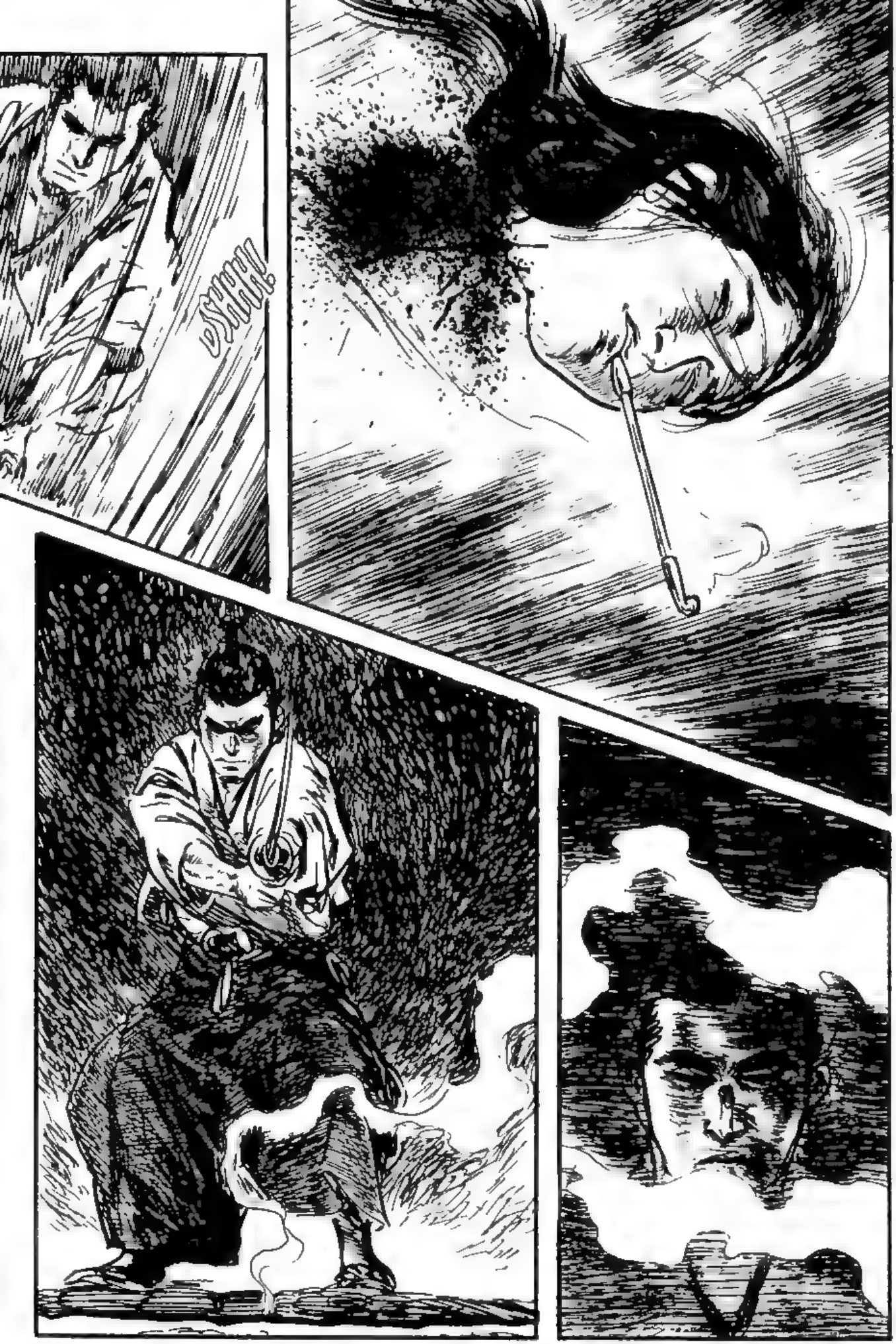
PUFF
PUFF

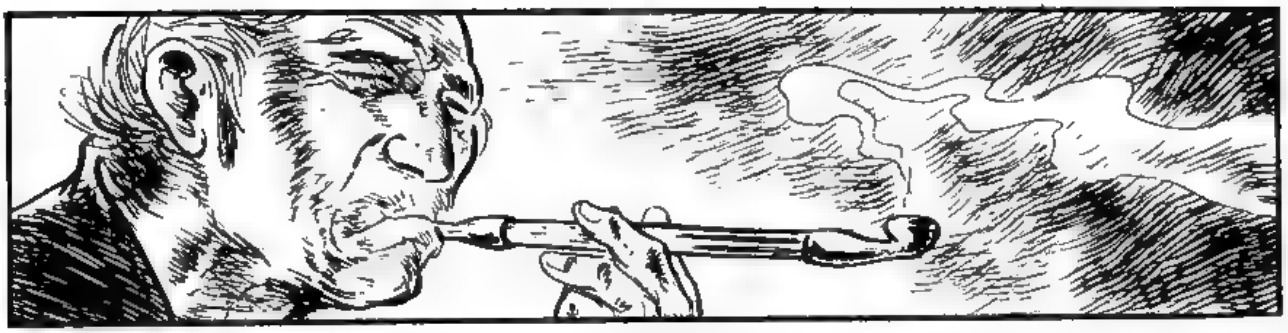
THIS IS MY GREATEST PLEASURE IN LIFE...
AFTER I'M DONE WORKING, I GOTTA HAVE A SMOKE. MAYBE THAT'S GOING TOO FAR, BUT...
IT'S NO EXAGGERATION TO SAY IT MAKES ME FEEL ALIVE.
FFT
TP TP
PUFF
PUFF

FFT
FFT
YAMADA-SAMA, SHE HAS A LAST REQUEST.
WHAT SHOULD WE DO?
WHAT IS IT?

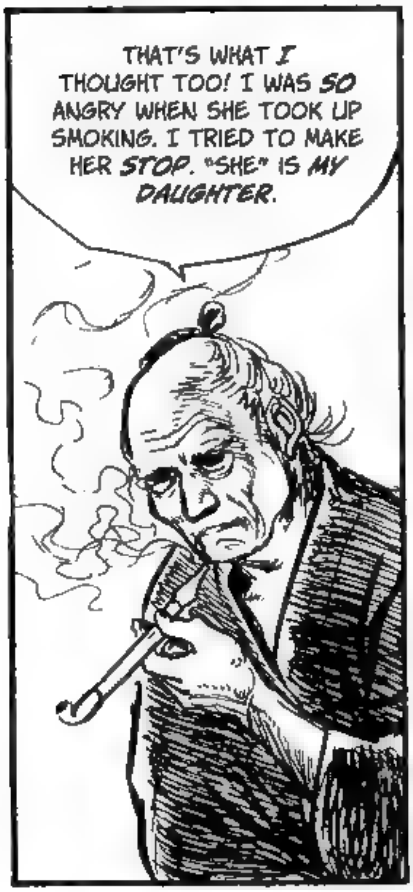
SHE'S A *REAL* TOBACCO ADDICT.
SHE WANTS YOU TO EXECUTE HER AS SHE ENJOYS HER LAST SMOKE.
THE HEAD PRISONER PUT IN A GOOD WORD FOR HER.
OH...OH...OH... PLEASE... I *BEG* YOU...
NO MATTER WHAT...
FINE.

fooo


SHAA!



I'M OLD, AND I DON'T HAVE LONG TO LIVE. I DON'T THINK I'M GONNA BE ABLE TO QUIT BEFORE I DIE.
TOBACCO IS POISONOUS.
PEOPLE HAVE GOTTEN DIZZY AND FALLEN WHILE INHALING ITS SMOKE. THEY COME TO CRAVE IT, AND THEY CAN'T STOP. THEY GET SICK AND HASTEN THEIR DEATHS...


THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT TOO! I WAS SO ANGRY WHEN SHE TOOK UP SMOKING. I TRIED TO MAKE HER STOP. "SHE" IS MY DAUGHTER.

SHE GOT HERSELF ENTANGLED WITH A REALLY BAD HUSTLER AND HE INTRODUCED HER TO SMOKING.
HE TAUGHT HER HOW TO GAMBLE, AND SHE ACTED LIKE A GANGSTER'S WOMAN. VERY UNLADYLIKE.

I TRIED TO DISCIPLINE HER. I YELLED AT HER.
PFFF!
AND FINALLY I DISOWNED HER, BUT...

WHERE AM I... AND WHAT AM I DOING... NOW?
I PITCHED IN BECAUSE I WAS THINKING OF HER. I'VE BECOME AN ADDICT, AND NOWADAYS SMOKING MAKES ME REMEMBER HER.
IF ONLY SHE WERE STILL ALIVE... AND DOING FINE...
TOBACCO WAS ONCE CALLED TANBAKO IN JAPAN...

the nineteenth

The Leaf Thief

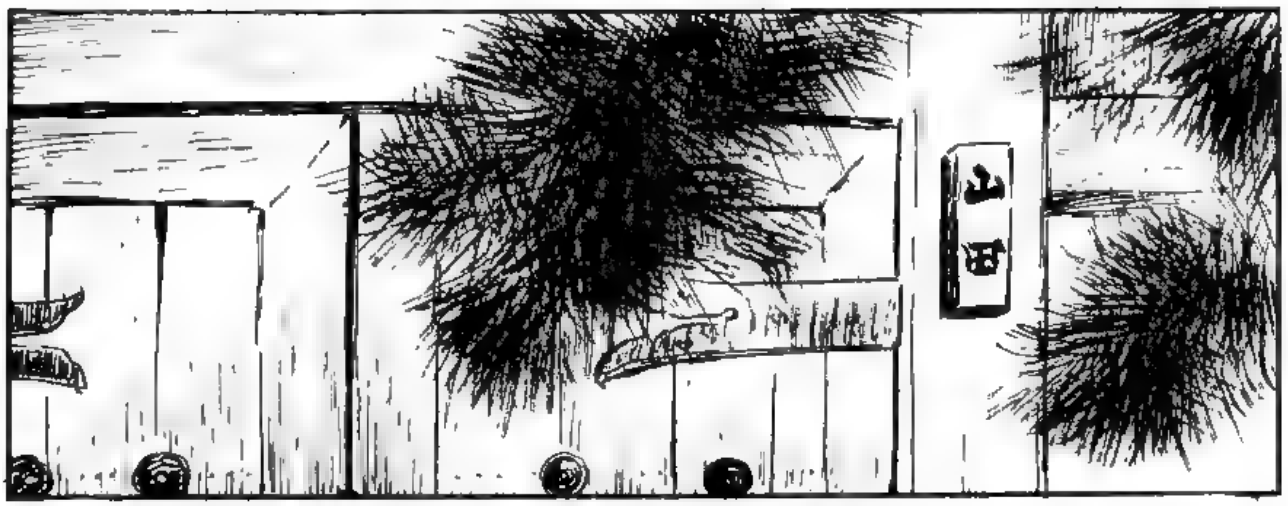
HEY,
YOU!

HEY,
YOU!
STOP!

STOP, KID!
O-OH... YAMADA-SAMA...
WHAT'S WRONG?
UH...THIS LITTLE BITCH'S BEEN LIVIN' IN THE HOUSES AROUND HERE...
AS YOU CAN SEE, THERE ARE A LOT OF EMPTY HOUSES IN THIS AREA...

SHE CAME OUTTA NOWHERE AND MOVED INTO 'EM. WE'VE BEEN TRYIN' TO CHASE HER *OUT*, BUT SHE KEEPS DANCIN' RIGHT BACK *IN*.
SO WE THOUGHT WE'D DRAG HER OUT AND GIVE HER A *WHACKING*.
SO WHAT HAS SHE *DONE*?
WELL, SHE REALLY HASN'T DONE *ANYTHING* WRONG... NOTHING'S *MISSING*...
BUT...
GOIN' AROUND AND SWEEPIN' LIKE THAT...
IT'S KINDA *WEIRD*. SHE'S PILIN' UP A *MOUNTAIN* OF LEAVES DAY AN' NIGHT WITHOUT SLEEPIN'.
WE KINDA NOTICED THAT THIS AREA WAS SWEPT *REAL* CLEAN...
AN' IF THAT'S *ALL* SHE'S DOIN', MAYBE THAT'D BE A *GOOD* THING, BUT...

IT'S DISTURBIN' HOW SHE SWEEPS UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. AND WHAT IF ALL THEM DRY LEAVES CALIGHT ON FIRE? IT'D BE HORRIBLE!
WE COULDN'T LET HER KEEP DOIN' THIS.. WE TRIED TO ASK HER WHAT WAS GOIN' ON, BUT SHE WOULDN'T SAY NOTHIN', NOT EVEN YES OR NO.
COUGH
COUGH COUGH
COUUUUUGH
UGHHHH
COUGH COUGH
BLTCH!
STOP IT! YOU'RE COUGHING UP BLOOD!

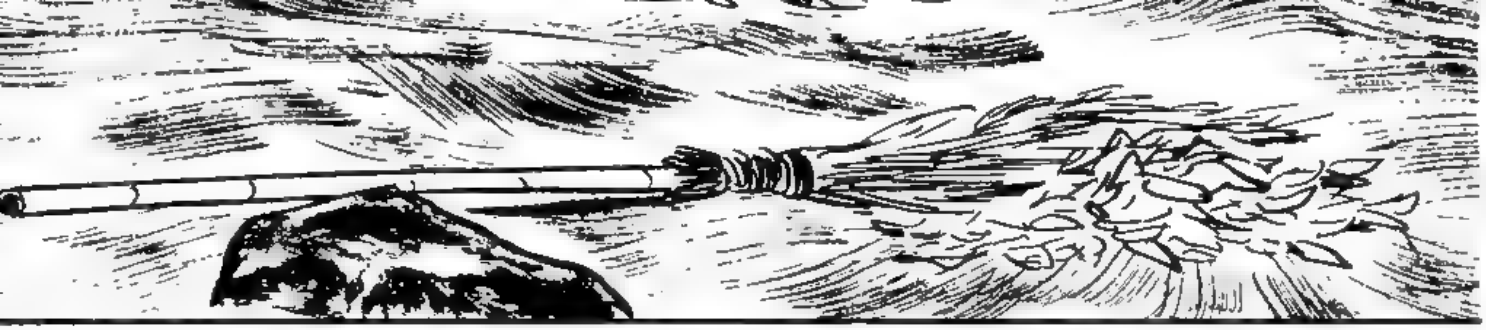

上田

IT'S *TUBERCULOSIS*. AND IT'S QUITE *ADVANCED*.
SO SHE *DOES* HAVE IT...
SHE'LL BE IN DANGER AS LONG AS SHE'S MALNOURISHED.
SHE'LL *HAVE* TO REST, EAT A LOT OF GOOD FOOD, AND GET HER STRENGTH BACK.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH.
OLD CLOTHES SHOP
WHY WOULD YAMADA-*SAMA* BUY CLOTHES AND BEDDING FOR A *GIRL*?
I DON'T GET IT...

OH, YAMADA-SAMA.
WE'VE BEEN HEARIN' A LOTTA STUFF, AN' THERE WAS SOMETHIN' ABOUT A GIRL...
WE'RE SORRY, BUT...
WHY DON'T YOU PUT HER IN THE KOISHIKAWA SANITARIUM?
WHO CARES IF YOU NEGLECT HER? SHE DOESN'T EVEN HAVE ANY RELATIVES. LET HER DIE LIKE A BEGGAR. MAYBE IT'S BETTER THAT WAY...
UM, SORRY...
ER... EXCUSE US...

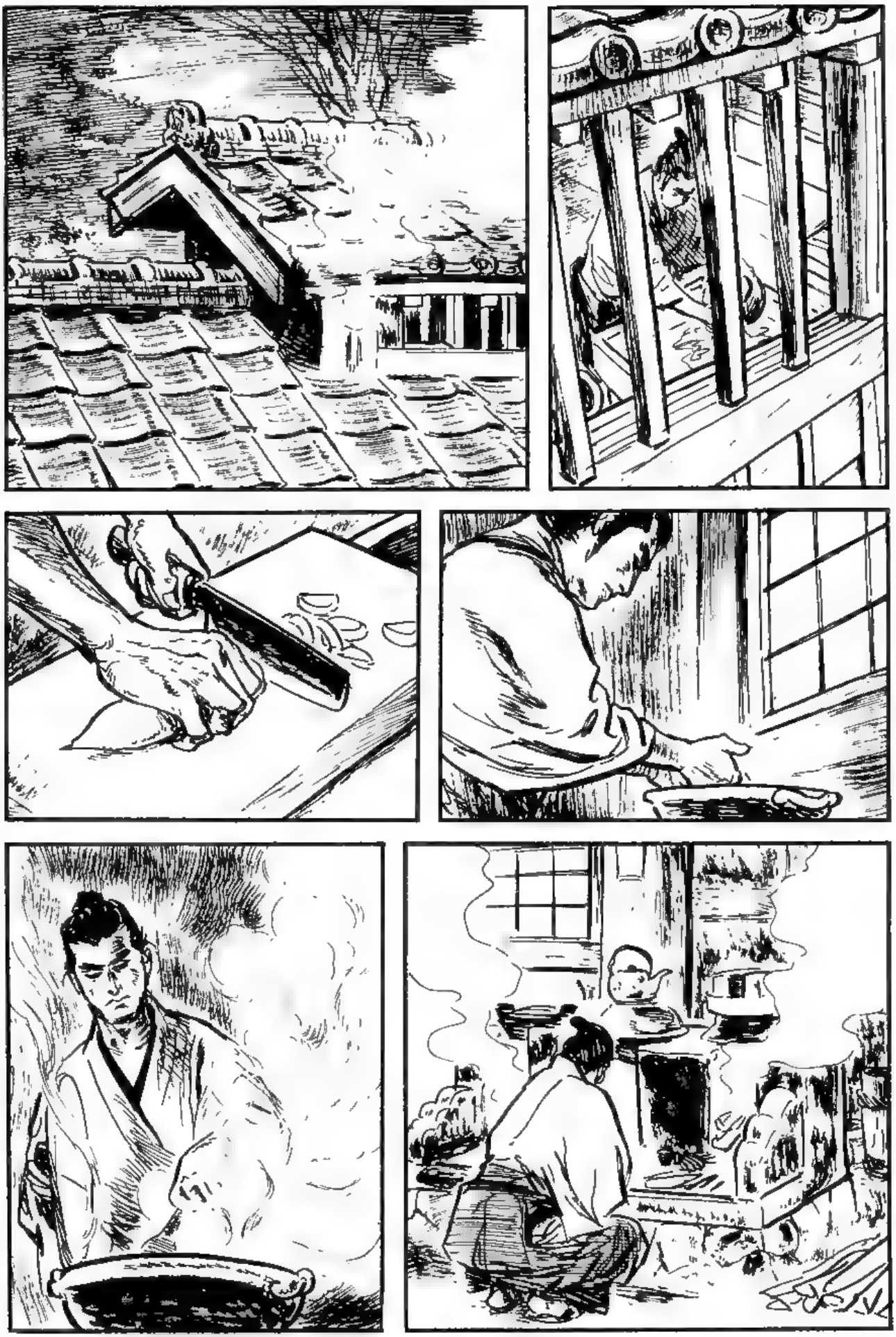
COUGH
COUGH
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?



YOU'RE A GOOD GIRL... BUT YOU'RE SICK.
YOU'VE GOT TO REST... OR ELSE YOU'LL DIE.
DON'T WORRY YOU WON'T HAVE TO SWEEP THE GARDEN... ALL RIGHT?

OKAY...?

CHANGE IT WHEN YOU'RE SWEATY.
IT'S YOURS.



COME ON, EAT!

諸行無常
是生滅法
生滅滅已
寂滅為樂
COUGH
COUGH

HUNT

CHEK!
YOU HAVE TUBERCULOSIS! UNLESS YOU GET SOME REST, YOU'RE GOING TO DIE!
COME ON, COME ON!

BE A GOOD GIRL. LIE DOWN NICELY.
I DON'T WANT TO DO THIS, BUT IF I DIDN'T, YOU'D JUST GET UP AND START SWEEPING LEAVES AGAIN!

WHY DOES SHE SWEEP LEAVES?

COUGH
COUGH

I-IF
I SWEEP...
THE
LEAVES...
DAD'LL...
COME
BACK...

DAD... HATES DEAD LEAVES...
DAD...
DAD...
CLUNK...
SHE'S GONE.
... HER FATHER WILL COME BACK...WHAT'D SHE MEAN BY THAT?

SWEEP
SWEEP
SWEEP
SWEEP
SWEEP
SWEEP

SORRY TO KEEP YOU WAITING!

HE SAID HE DIDN'T WANT TO STEP ON ANY DEAD LEAVES...
DID YOU SAY "*DEAD LEAVES*"?!

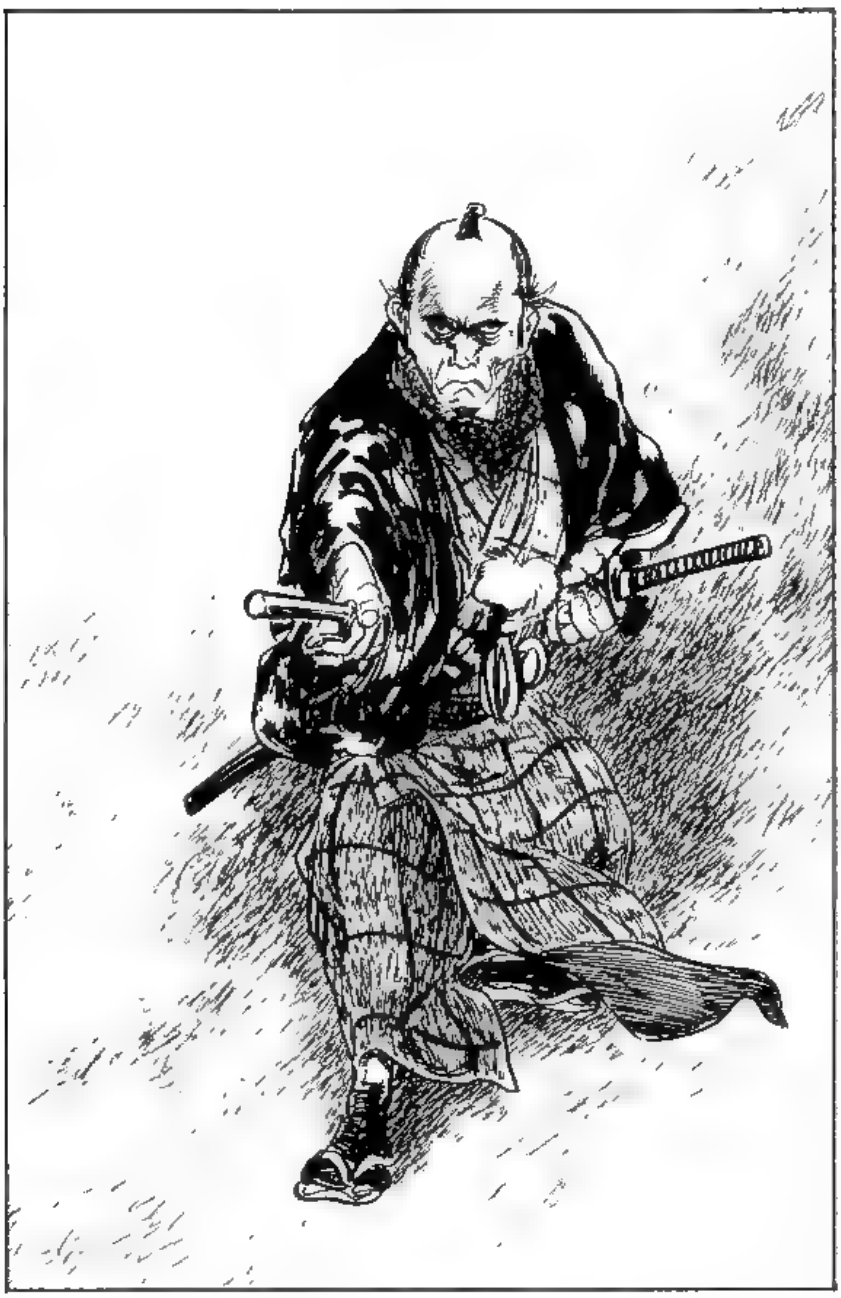
YES. STEPPING ON DEAD LEAVES MAKES *NOISE*.
WHEN THIEVES DO THEIR "WORK," THEY TRY NOT TO STEP ON ANY DEAD LEAVES.

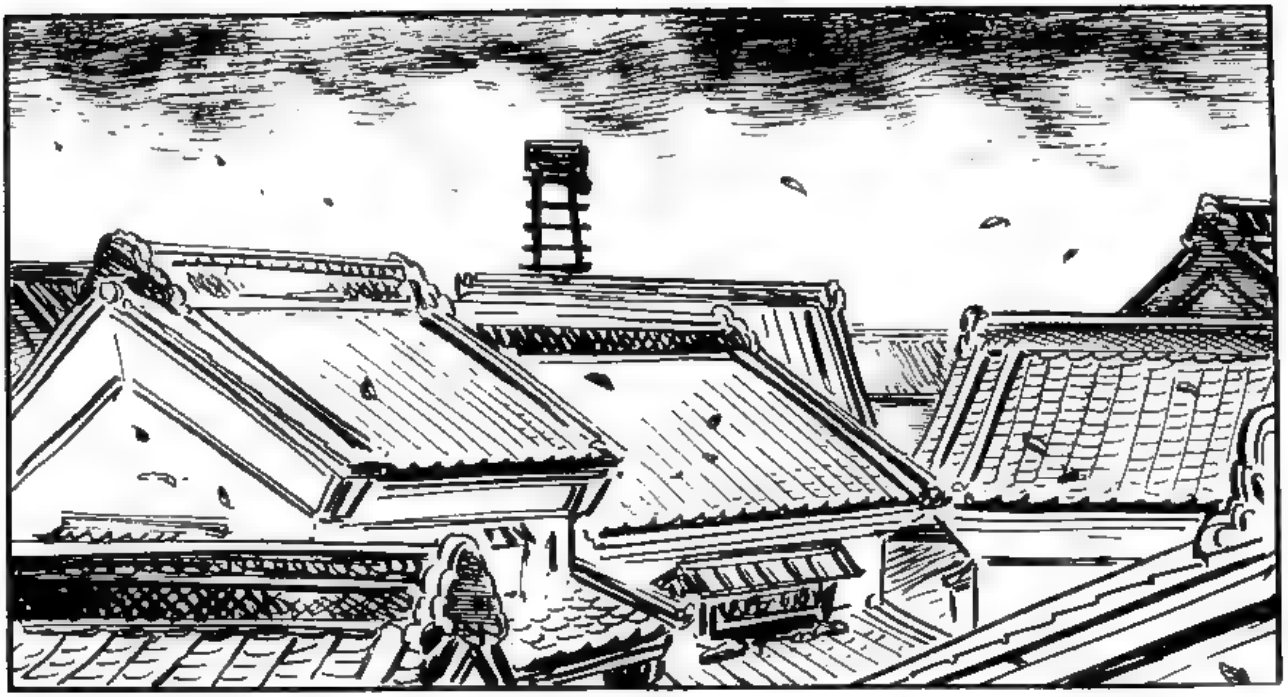
SINCE HE SPENT HIS WHOLE LIFE AS A THIEF, HE WANTS TO DIE WITHOUT MAKING ANY NOISE BY STEPPING ON DEAD LEAVES. WHO DOES HE THINK HE IS?!

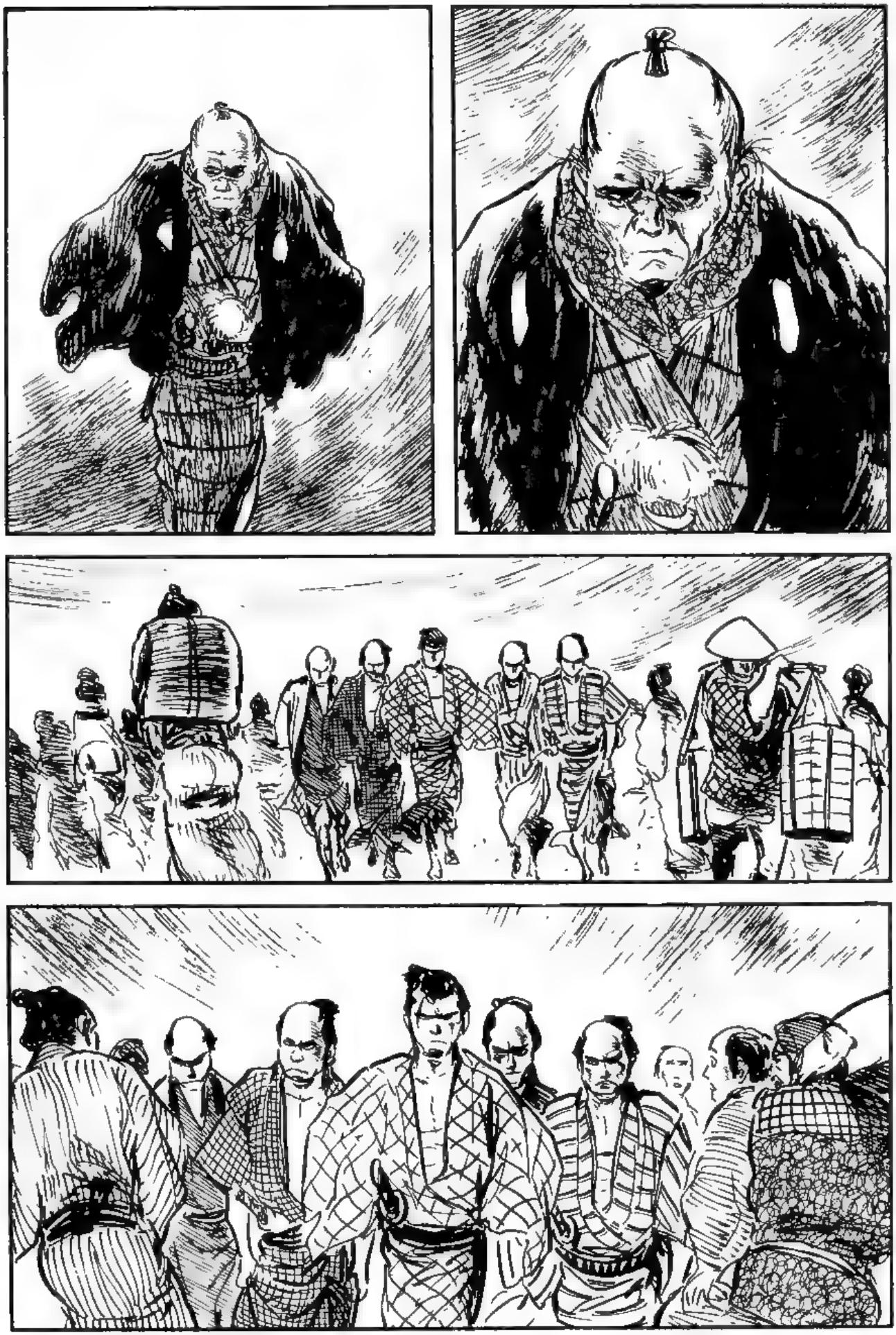
YOU'RE SMOKY KOZABURŌ, AREN'T YOU?!
YEAH, SORRY TO BOTHER YA!
DO YOU HAVE A DAUGHTER? ABOUT TEN, CAN'T TELL RIGHT FROM WRONG?
NO! I'M ALL BY MY LONESOME!
IS THAT SO?!
WHAT?! YOU SAYIN' THAT GIRL'S *MINE*?!
SHE BELIEVED HER FATHER WOULD COME BACK TO HER IF SHE SWEPT DEAD LEAVES. EVEN THOUGH SHE WAS SICK, SHE SWEPT THEM *DAY* AND *NIGHT*.
SHE *PASSED AWAY* TEN DAYS AGO!

OH YEAH?! MUST BE THE DAUGHTER OF ONE OF MY BUDDIES!
DBSHHHH!

the twentieth Tōgane Yajirō

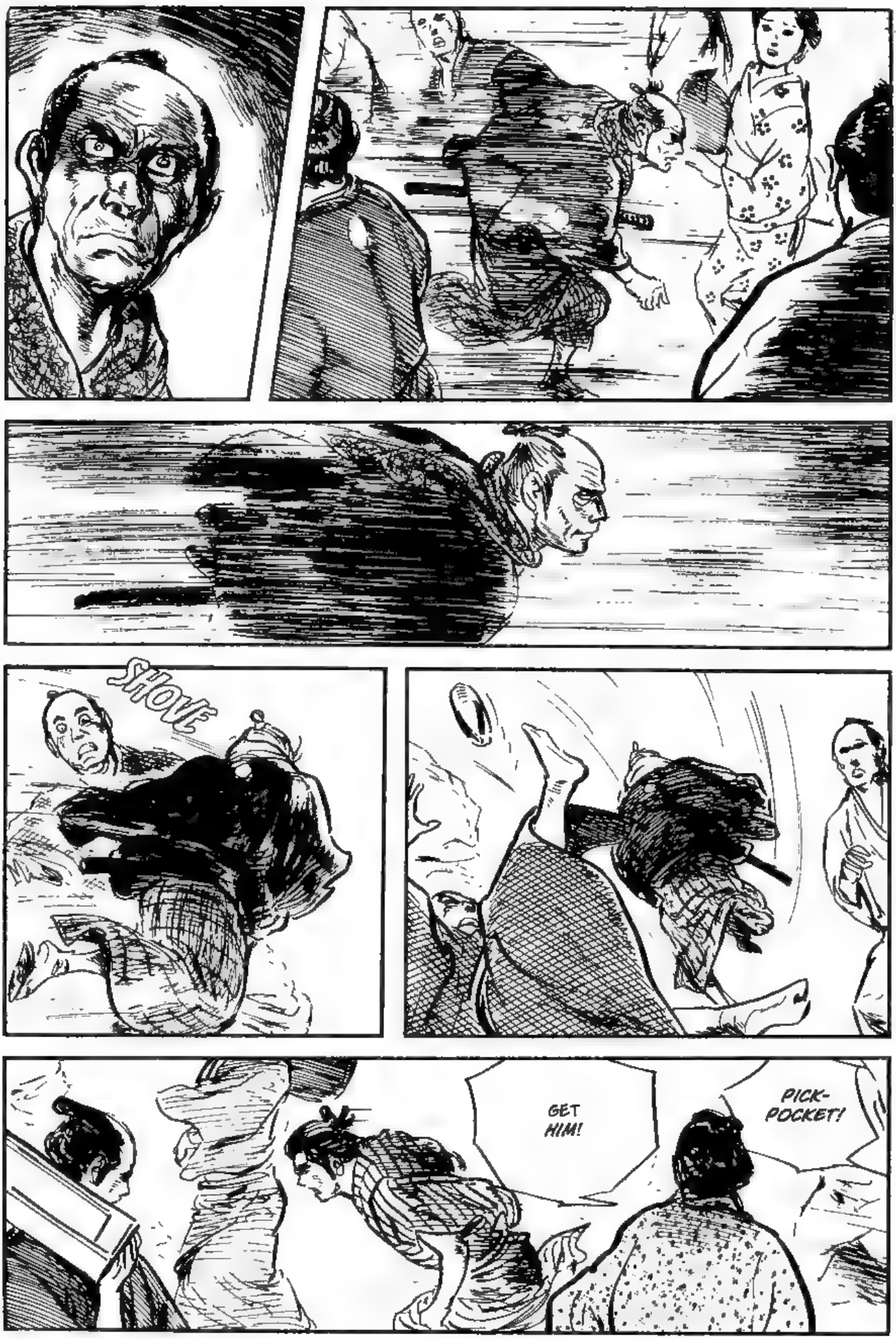


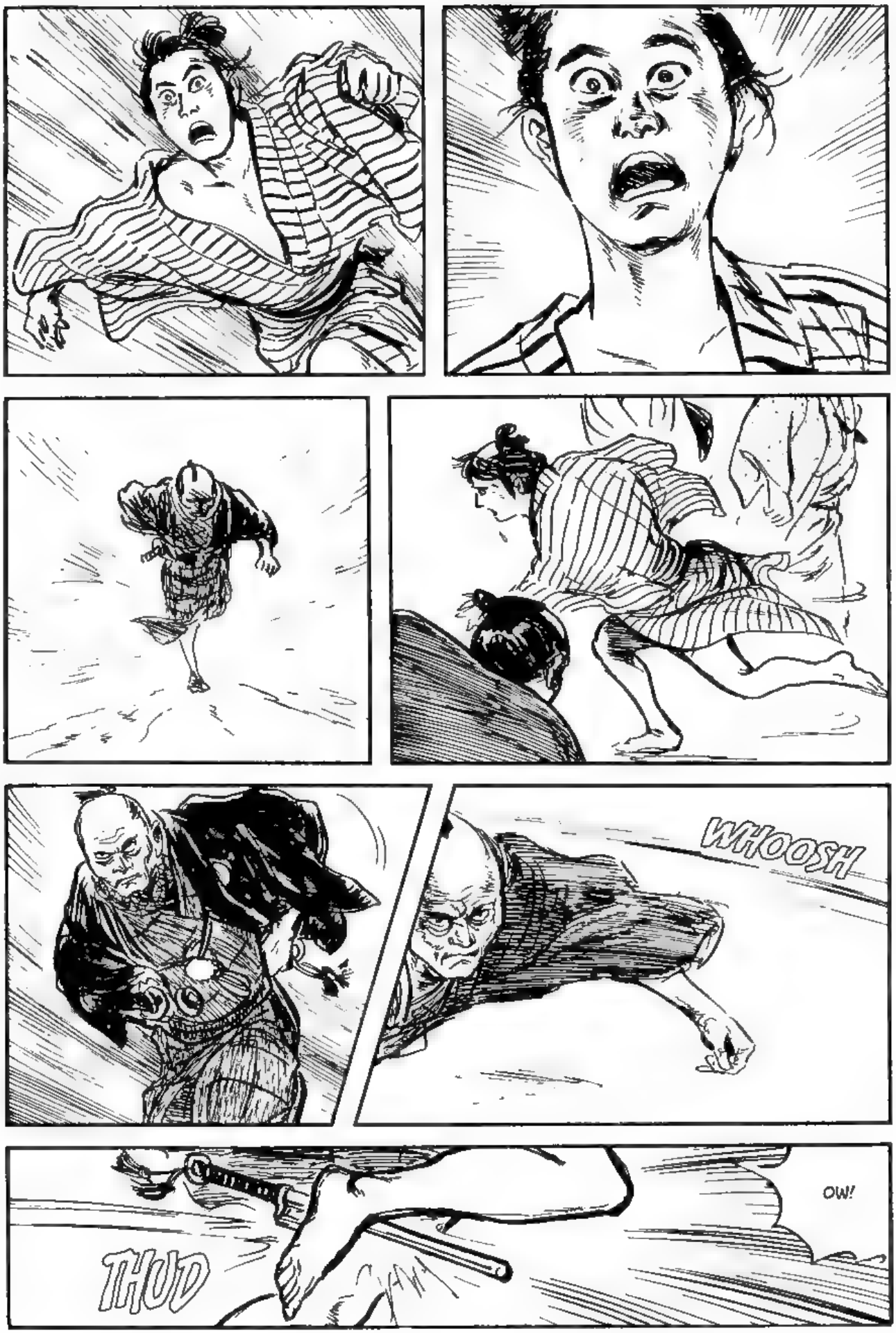




AH, IT'S YOU, SIR...
G-GOOD DAY... OFFICER...
H-HELLO.

PICKPOCKET!

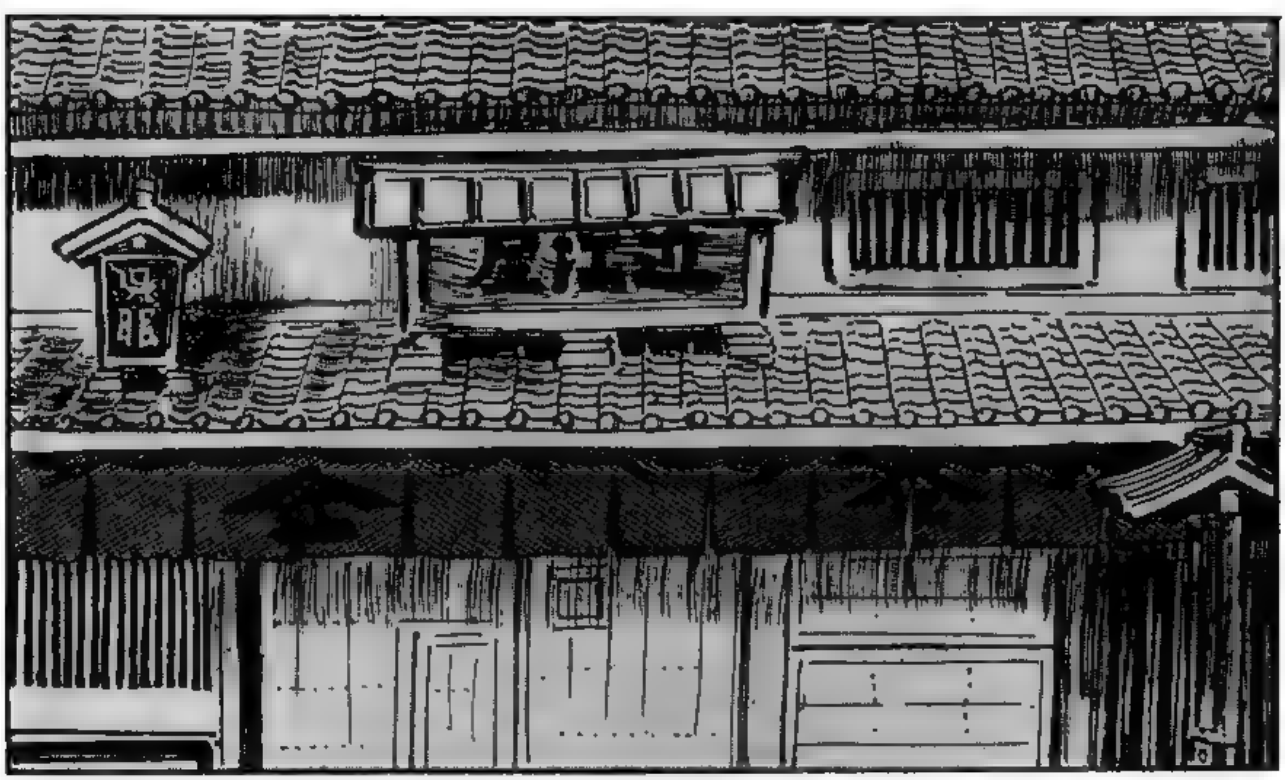

SHOVE
GET HIM!
PICK-POCKET!

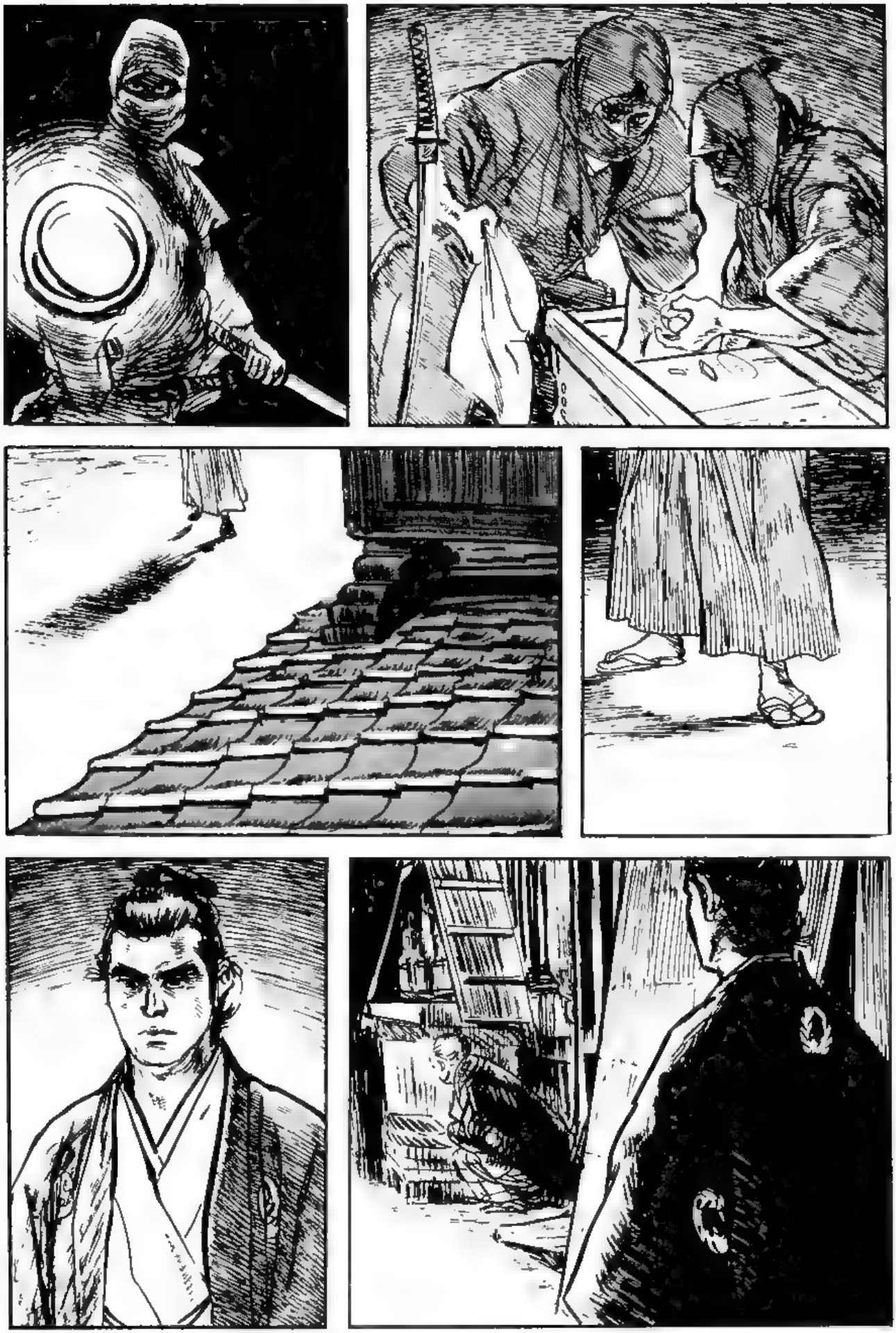

WHOOSH
THUD
OW!

THUNK
BSHHH!
OW!
AAAH!
PLOP
TH-
THANKS.

BSHHH!
OW!
BSHHH!
AAAH!
BSHHH!
BSHHH!
AAAH!
ARGH!
UHHH...

ISN'T HE JUST A KID?
THAT'S HORRIBLE.
WHY'D HE HAVE TO HURT HIM THAT MUCH?
HE MESSED WITH THE WRONG GUY-- TŌGANE YAJIRŌ.
DEMON OF THE JITTE! LORD OF THE NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE!
HE'S BEEN A PATROLMAN FOR FORTY YEARS.
IN THESE TIMES WHEN FEWER CRIMINALS ARE GETTING CAUGHT, THEY SAY TŌGANE STILL GETS HIS MAN EVERY THREE DAYS.
TŌ-GAINS HIS MAN, HUH?

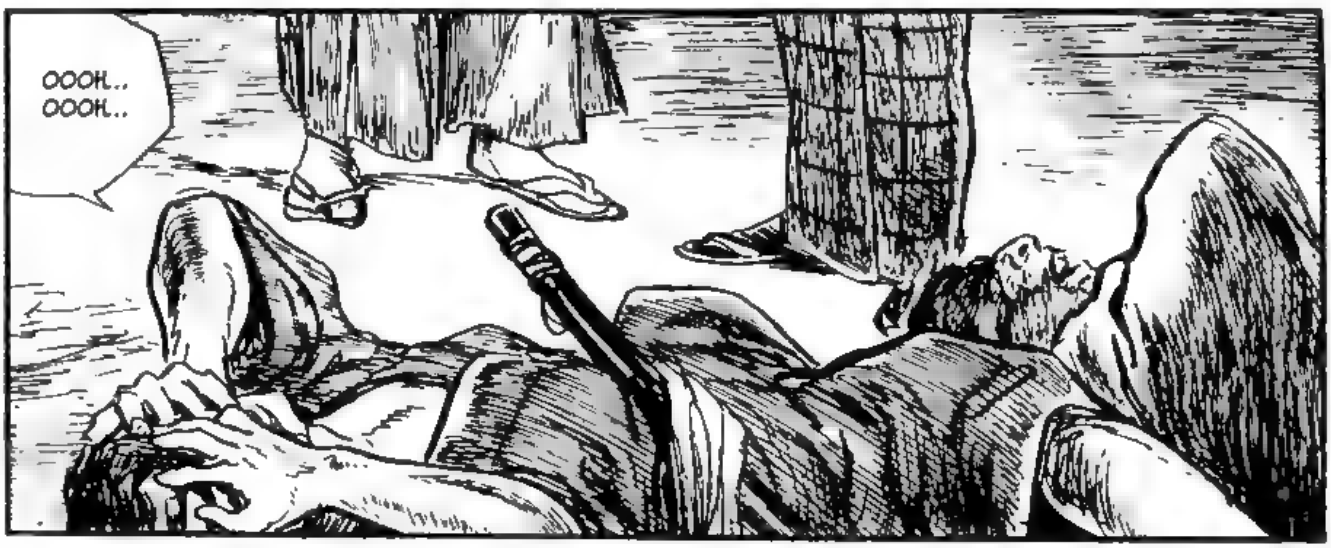


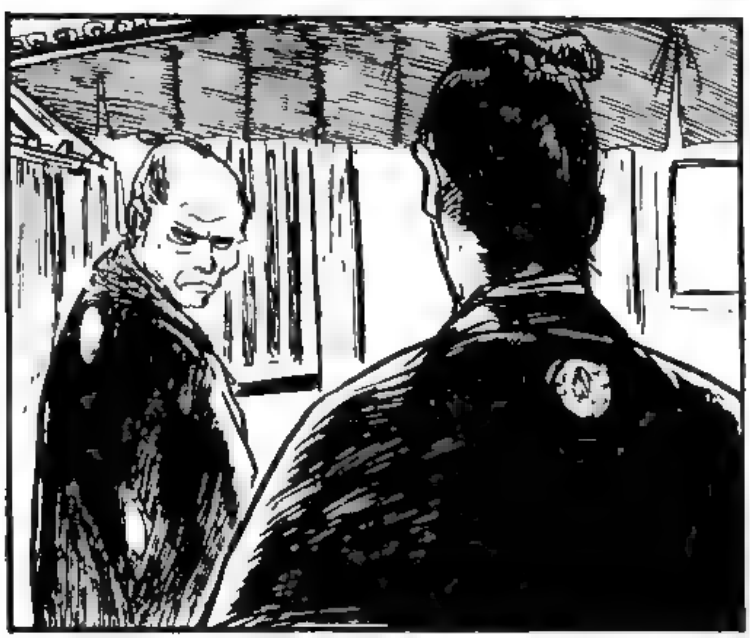


KTHUNK
WHOOSH!
POLICE!
PUT YOUR WEAPONS DOWN!

HMPH!
TCH!
SWISH!
BSHHH!
I'LL HELP YOU!
WHAP!
TRYIN' TO TAKE CREDIT AWAY FROM ME? GET LOST!

URGH!
WHUNK!
BSHHH!
GUHHH!
OOOH...
UHHH...
HMPH! YOU'RE A HEAD-CHOPPER?


OOOH..
OOOH..



YOU LOOK LIKE YOU WANNA SAY *SOMETHIN'* TO ME, HEAD-CHOPPER...
SO SPIT IT OUT!
SIR, COULD YOU STOP CALLING ME "HEAD-CHOPPER"?
EVEN WHAT *I* DO HAS A RESPECTABLE TITLE.
YOU'RE A HEAD-CHOPPER, SO YOU'RE A *HEAD-CHOPPER!* WHAT'S WRONG WITH *THAT*?!
I KNEW YOUR *GRANDPA* AND YOUR *DAD!* THEY WERE BOTH *REAL* MEN.
THEY WEREN'T LIKE *YOU.* THEY WERE *PROUD* TO BE CALLED "HEAD-CHOPPERS"!
THEY WERE CALLED THAT BECAUSE THEY WERE *RESPECTABLE* HEAD-CHOPPERS!

BUT YOU JUST GET MAD WHEN I CALL YOU THAT!
YOU'RE THE WORST OUT OF ALL THREE GENERATIONS.
HURRY UP AND GET OUTTA HERE, YOU WORTHLESS HEAD-CHOPPER!
OOH...
GSHHH!

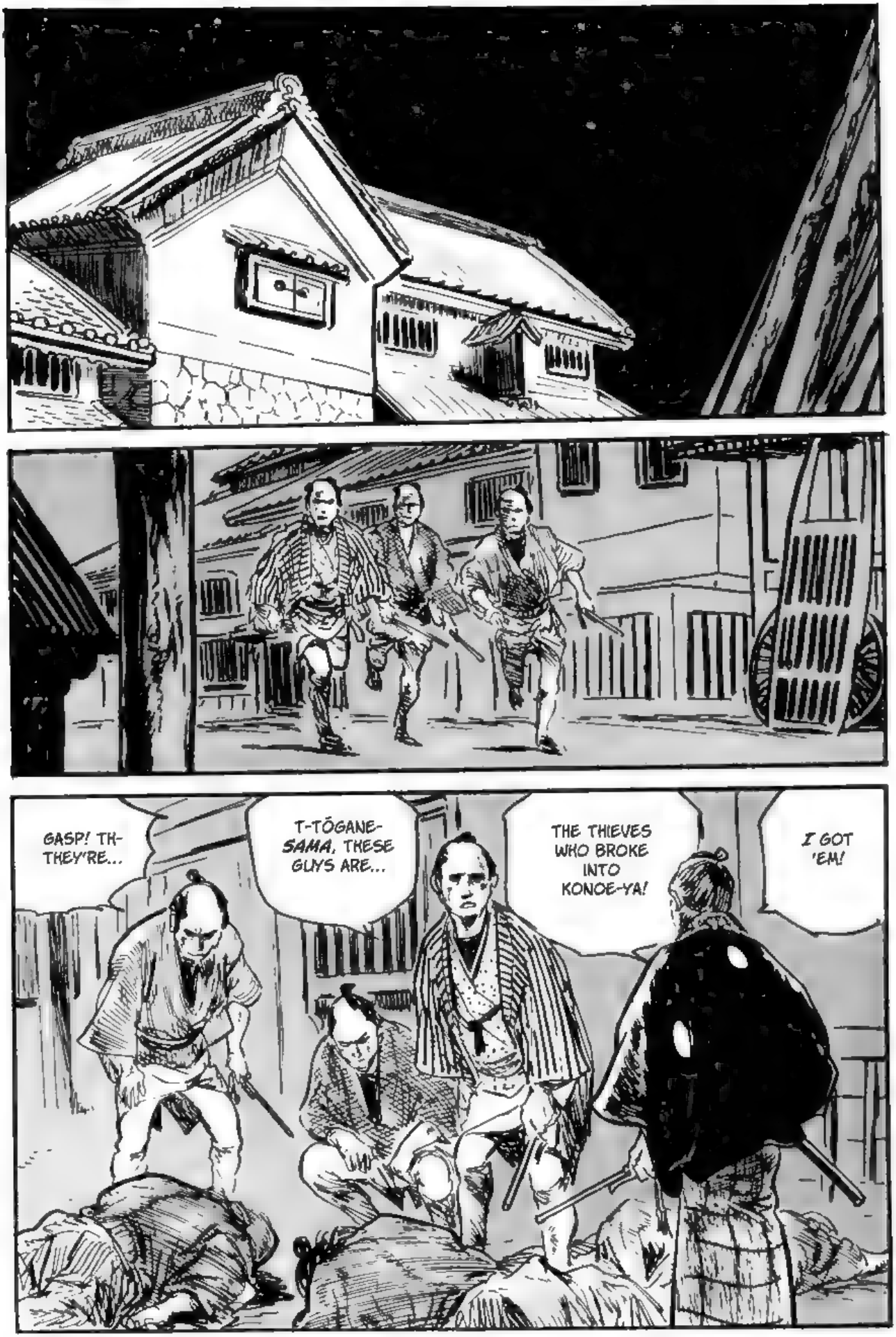
OWWW!!
YOU SCUM!
WHACK!!
NGHHH!

YOU'RE NOT GONNA MOVE AGAIN AFTER THIS!
GSHHH!
SIR!

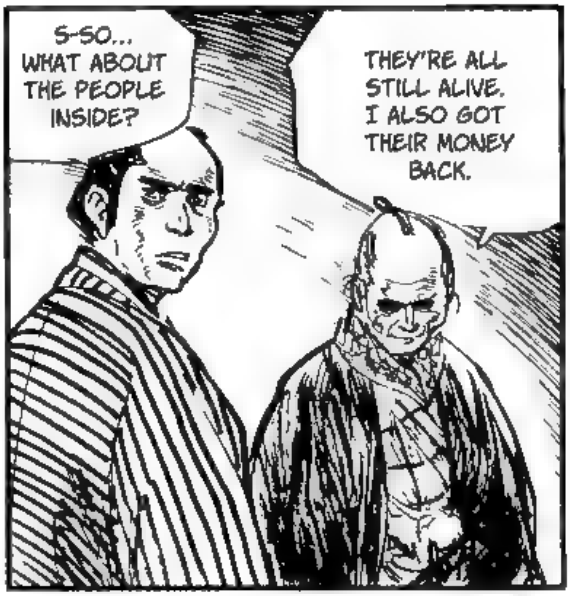
WHAT?! YOU'RE STILL HERE?! WHADDAYA MEAN, "SIR"?!
I MIGHT BE OLD, BUT I'M NOT GONNA LET SOME YOUNG BRATS BEAT ME!
LOOK AT HOW I CAUGHT THESE THREE OVERGROWN RATS WHO SNUCK IN TONIGHT!
ONLY I COULD'VE DONE THAT.
THAT'S WHAT I WANT TO ASK YOU ABOUT.
BY CHANCE I WAS PASSING BY, AND I SAW THE WHOLE THING.
WHAT?!
THE THIEVES MUST HAVE BEEN IN THE HOUSE WHILE YOU WERE STAKING IT OUT.
SO WHAT?!

WHY DIDN'T YOU *STEP IN*?! IF THEY WERE TOO MUCH FOR YOU, YOU COULD HAVE WHISTLED FOR THE *OKAPPIKI*!
UMMM...
GOING IN AND SAVING THE PEOPLE INSIDE IS *MORE* IMPORTANT THAN MAKING A BUST.
IT'S YOUR DUTY AS A *JITTE* MAN TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR SAFETY.
MOREOVER, WHEN I OFFERED TO HELP, YOU SAID YOU FELT I WAS GOING TO TAKE THE CREDIT AWAY FROM YOU.
SO DO YOU ALWAYS WIELD YOUR *JITTE* FOR YOUR *OWN* GLORY?

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND HOW YOU CAN VALUE YOUR *OWN* REPUTATION OVER THE LIVES AND PROPERTY OF THE PEOPLE AS A DEFENDER OF LAW AND ORDER IN EDO. COULD YOU EXPLAIN THAT TO ME?
HMPH! JUST LIKE A HEAD-CHOPPER! USELESS TALK! I HAVE MY *OWN* WAY OF THINKING, MY *OWN* WAY OF LIFE! I *WON'T* LISTEN TO THE LIKES OF *YOU*!
ALL RIGHT. I'LL REPORT EVERYTHING TO THE NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER WOULD THAT BE ACCEPTABLE?
DO WHATEVER YOU WANT!
PWEEET


GASP! TH-THEY'RE...
T-TŌGANE-SAMA, THESE GUYS ARE...
THE THIEVES WHO BROKE INTO KONOE-YA!
I GOT 'EM!

TAKE 'EM AWAY.


S-SO... WHAT ABOUT THE PEOPLE INSIDE?
THEY'RE ALL STILL ALIVE. I ALSO GOT THEIR MONEY BACK.

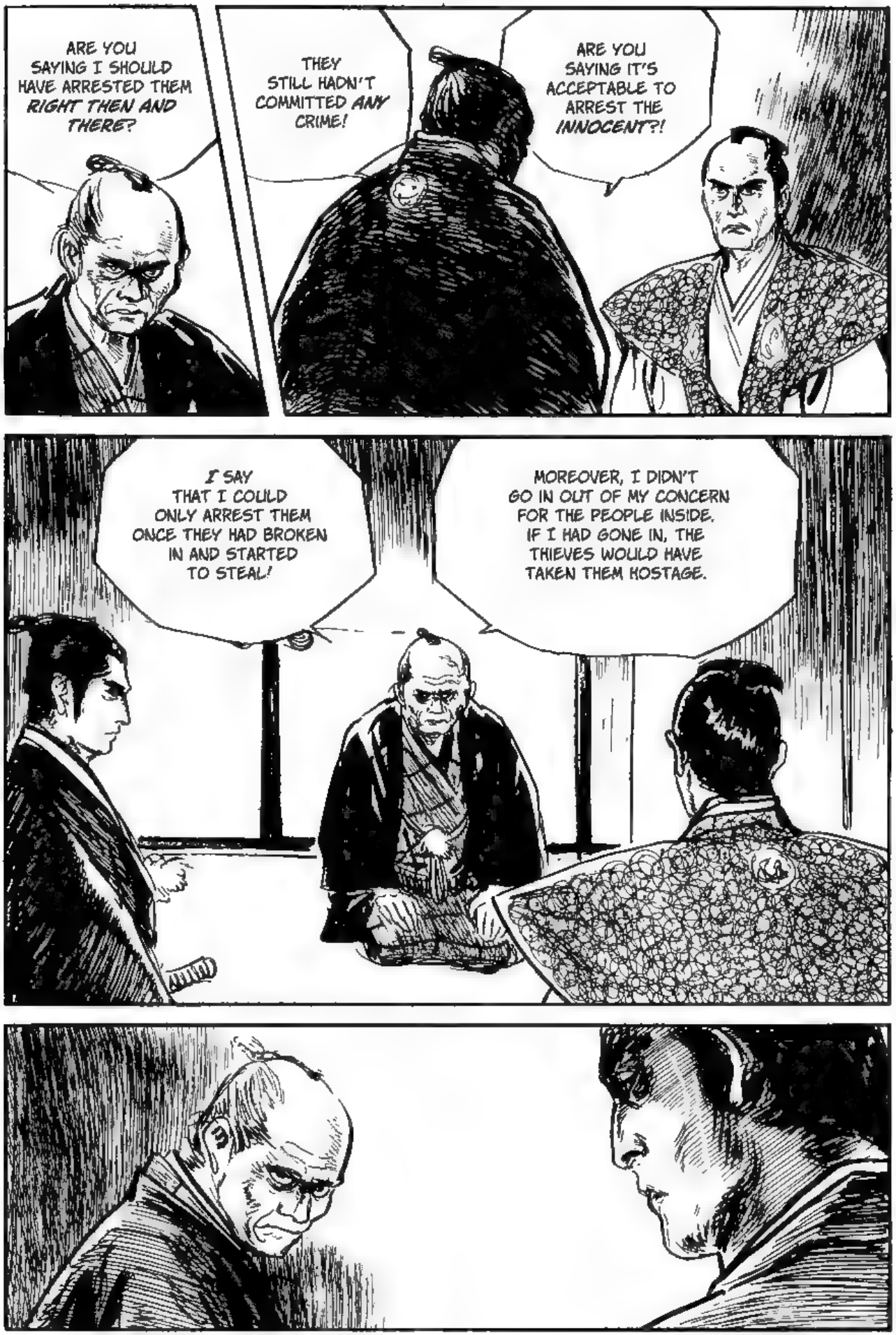
HOW WOULD *YOU* KNOW IF YOU HADN'T GONE INSIDE?

INSTINCT!
I DON'T SMELL ANY BLOOD.

TH-THANK YOU.
YOU'RE ALL OKAY?
Y-YES.

北町奉行
NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE
I DO THINK EVERYTHING HAPPENED JUST AS ASAEMON SAID, SO...

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY FOR YOURSELF, YAJIRŌ?!
I HAD HEARD THAT THOSE THIEVES WERE GOING TO BREAK INTO KONOE-YA THAT NIGHT, SO I STAKED THEM OUT.
THEN I WAITED A LITTLE WHILE, AND THOSE THREE *RONIN* SHOWED UP.


ARE YOU SAYING I SHOULD HAVE ARRESTED THEM *RIGHT THEN AND THERE*?
THEY STILL HADN'T COMMITTED *ANY* CRIME!
ARE YOU SAYING IT'S ACCEPTABLE TO ARREST THE *INNOCENT*?!
I SAY THAT I COULD ONLY ARREST THEM ONCE THEY HAD BROKEN IN AND STARTED TO STEAL!
MOREOVER, I DIDN'T GO IN OUT OF MY CONCERN FOR THE PEOPLE INSIDE. IF I HAD GONE IN, THE THIEVES WOULD HAVE TAKEN THEM HOSTAGE.

DON'T STRETCH THE TRUTH!
WHAT?!
I HAVE A QUESTION. IF SOMEONE IS *ABOUT* TO COMMIT SUICIDE BY JUMPING INTO A RIVER...
WOULD YOU JUST *WATCH* AND DO *NOTHING* UNTIL *AFTER* HE JUMPED IN?
...
...

LET'S SUPPOSE THERE'S A FIRE. WOULD YOU JUST WATCH AND DO NOTHING UNTIL AFTER IT SPREADS?
AND IF A CHILD IS ABOUT TO BE ATTACKED BY A DOG, THEN YOU WOULDN'T DO ANYTHING UNTIL AFTER THE DOG BIT HIM...?
SH-SHUT UP!
THIS WAS A TOTALLY DIFFERENT SITUATION!
DAMN YOU, HEAD-CHOPPER!
YOU USED SUCH EXTREME EXAMPLES TO REPRIMAND ME! DO YOU HAVE A GRUDGE AGAINST ME?!

I AM SPEAKING AS A "HEAD-CHOPPER." I COULD *NEVER* BEHEAD AN INNOCENT MAN!
S-SO YOU'RE SAYING...
THAT *I* ARREST THE *INNOCENT*?!
HOW *DARE* YOU SAY THAT!
THAT'S ENOUGH, YAJIRO!
LISTEN TO WHAT ASAEMON HAS TO SAY *FIRST*.

I THINK A JITTE MAN'S DUTY IS TO PREVENT CRIME.
TO WAIT UNTIL A CRIME IS COMMITTED IS THE SAME AS COMMITTING A CRIME.
IT WAS WITHIN YOUR POWERS AS A JITTE MAN TO INVESTIGATE THE SITUATION.
IF YOU HAD DONE SO, THE TRIO WOULD HAVE GIVEN UP ON BREAKING IN, AND THEIR CRIME WOULD HAVE BEEN PREVENTED.
SHOULDN'T A JITTE MAN'S FIRST PRIORITY BE TO PREVENT CRIME...
RATHER THAN TO WAIT FOR CRIME AND ARREST THE CRIMINALS?
HAH! THAT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE!

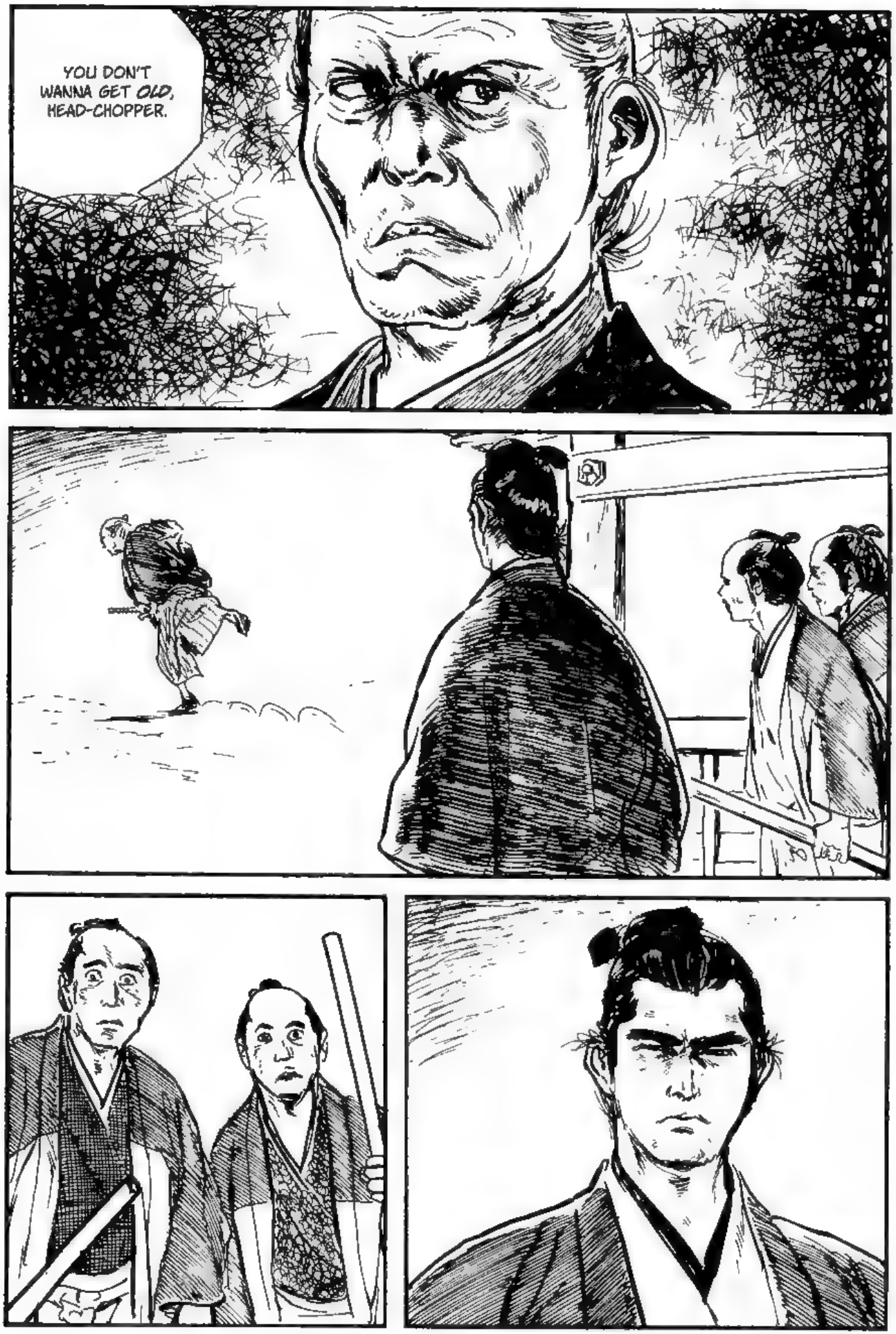
PERHAPS YOU'RE RIGHT. *STILL*, I THINK THAT'S WHAT YOU SHOULD *BELIEVE*.
EXACTLY, YAJIRŌ! I'VE HEARD *SO* MUCH ABOUT YOU! THEY SAY *TŌ-GAINS* A MAN EVERY THREE DAYS EVEN IN AN AGE WHEN ARRESTS ARE GOING DOWN. MAYBE THAT'S GONE TO YOUR *HEAD*.
IF I MAY SPEAK FOR MYSELF, I SWEAR ON MY *JITTE* THAT I HAVE *NEVER* ARRESTED AN INNOCENT PERSON...

HE UNDERSTANDS THAT YOU ARE *PASSIONATE* ABOUT POLICE WORK!
BUT HE'S SAYING THAT YOU SHOULD USE YOUR *DISCRETION*.
HE'S TELLING YOU TO STOP *WAITING* FOR CRIMES TO OCCUR!
IF YOU KNOW IN *ADVANCE* THAT A CRIME IS ABOUT TO TAKE PLACE, IT IS YOUR DUTY AS A *JITTE* MAN TO DO EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO PREVENT IT. DON'T FORGET THAT.
ALL RIGHT?!
YES, SIR.

北町奉行所
NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

...
...
町奉行所
NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE
HEAD-CHOPPER... HOW MANY HEADS YOU LOPPED OFF?
I'VE BEEN A COP FOR FORTY-ONE YEARS NOW... I'VE BUSTED OVER FOUR THOUSAND GUYS.
TAP
TAP

TAP
TAP
TAP
TAP
THERE'S A FINITE NUMBER OF GRAINS OF SAND ON A BEACH. BUT THERE'S AN *INFINITE* NUMBER OF THIEVES IN THIS WORLD!


YOU DON'T WANNA GET *OLD*, HEAD-CHOPPER.

THREE DAYS LATER, IN THE FREEZING COLD OF THE FINAL MONTH, AN INCIDENT SHOOK UP ALL OF EDO.

BANG!
THIS WAS THE SO-CALLED "ASHIGARU GENNAI GUN INCIDENT"

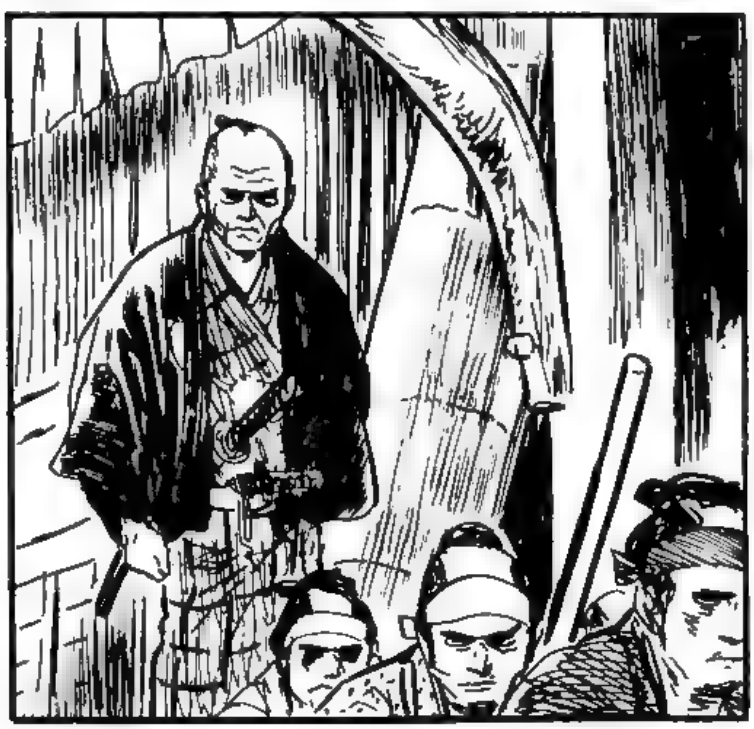
AN ASHIGARU OF SAK. UTANOKAMI, GENNAI, A.K.A. SANADA BUNJI, FELL FOR MINÉ, THE SECOND DAUGHTER OF HIS FELLOW FOOTSOLDIER KIMURA SONBEE. HE FREQUENTLY MADE ADVANCES, BUT SHE WAS ALREADY COMMITTED.

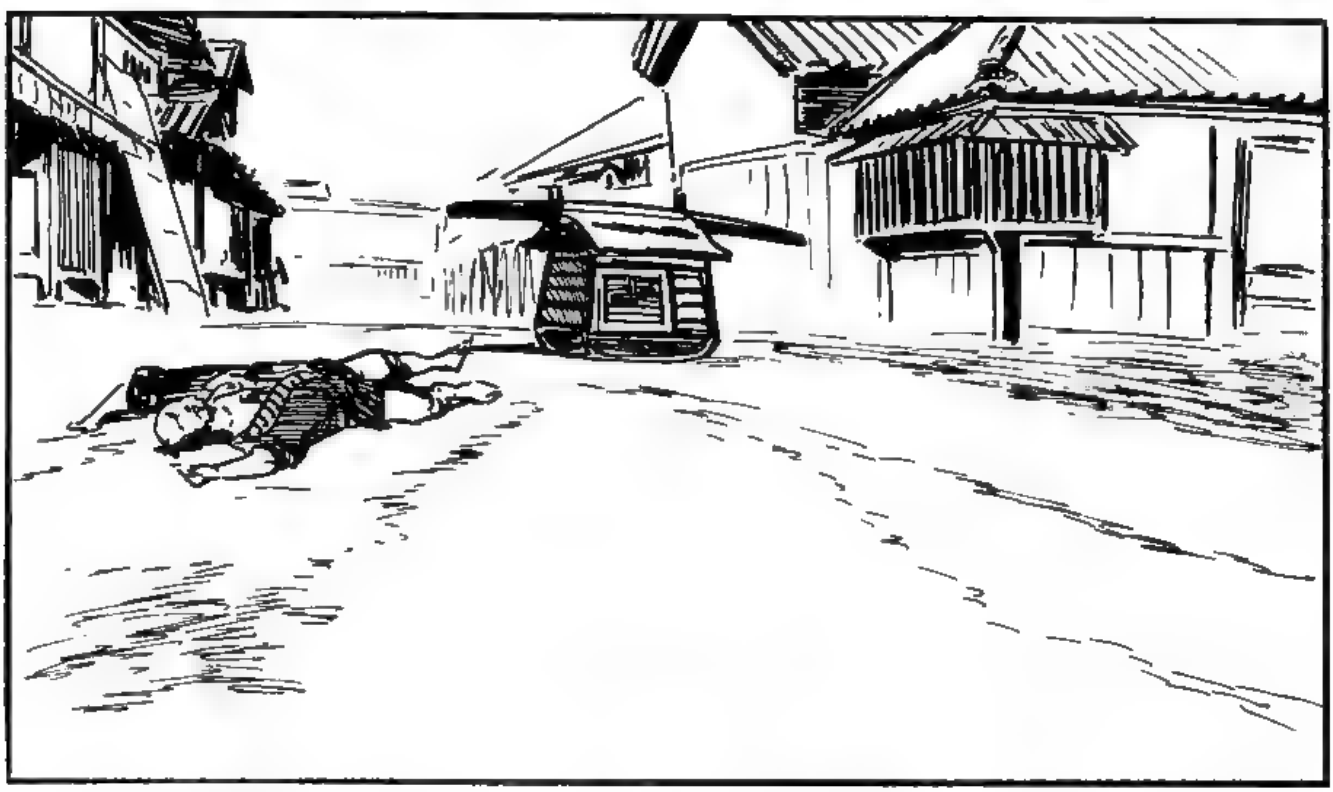
ON THIS DAY, GENNAI WAS DRUNK AND DEMANDED MINÉ AS HIS BRIDE, EMBARRASSING HIS HOUSE.

GET OUTTA MY WAY, DAMMIT!
AAAH!
I'M GONNA KILL HER!
EEEK!
BANG!

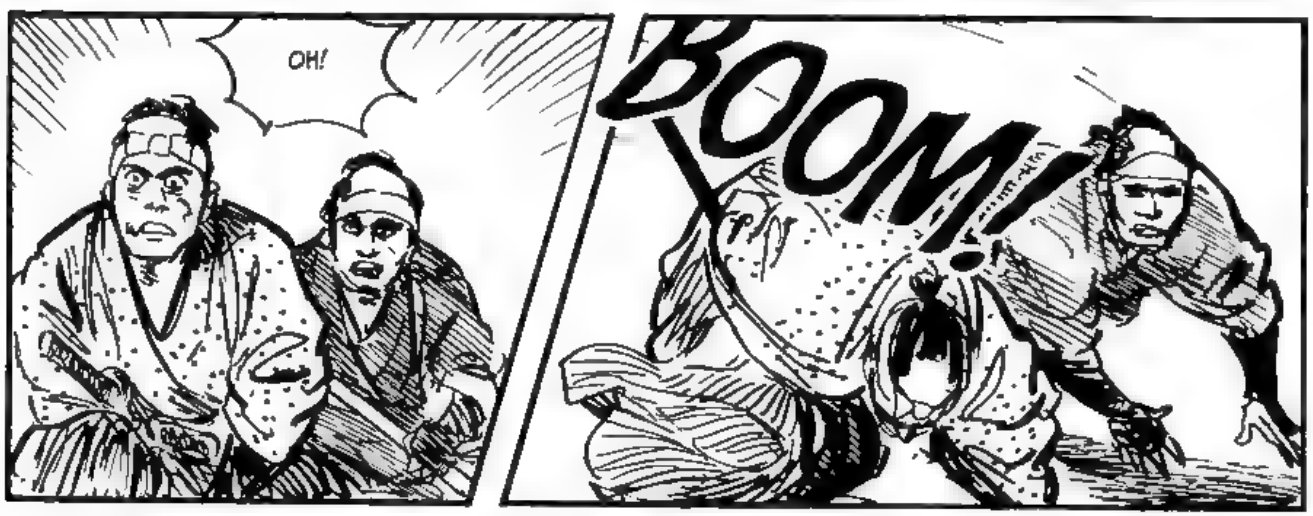
WHEN THE MEMBERS OF GENNAI'S HOUSE CHASED HIM OUT, HE SUDDENLY WENT BERSERK.
AND WHEN THEY TRIED TO STOP HIM, HE FLED TO HIS HOME, TOOK THE GUN HIS MASTER HAD ENTRUSTED HIM WITH, AND KIMURA SONBEE DIED ON THE SPOT.
SHŌSHICHI, THE OIL SELLER NEXT DOOR, WAS THE NEXT TO DIE...
FOLLOWED BY TAMI, THIRD DAUGHTER OF MINO-YA OF TORIGOE-CHŌ.
GENNAI'S GUN WAS A NEW, SINGLE-BARREL, THREE-SHOT MODEL FITTED WITH AN INOUE SCHOOL MECHANISM.
MOREOVER, GENNAI HAD OVER TEN LIVE CARTRIDGES.
—NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER INOUE KAWACHINOKAMI

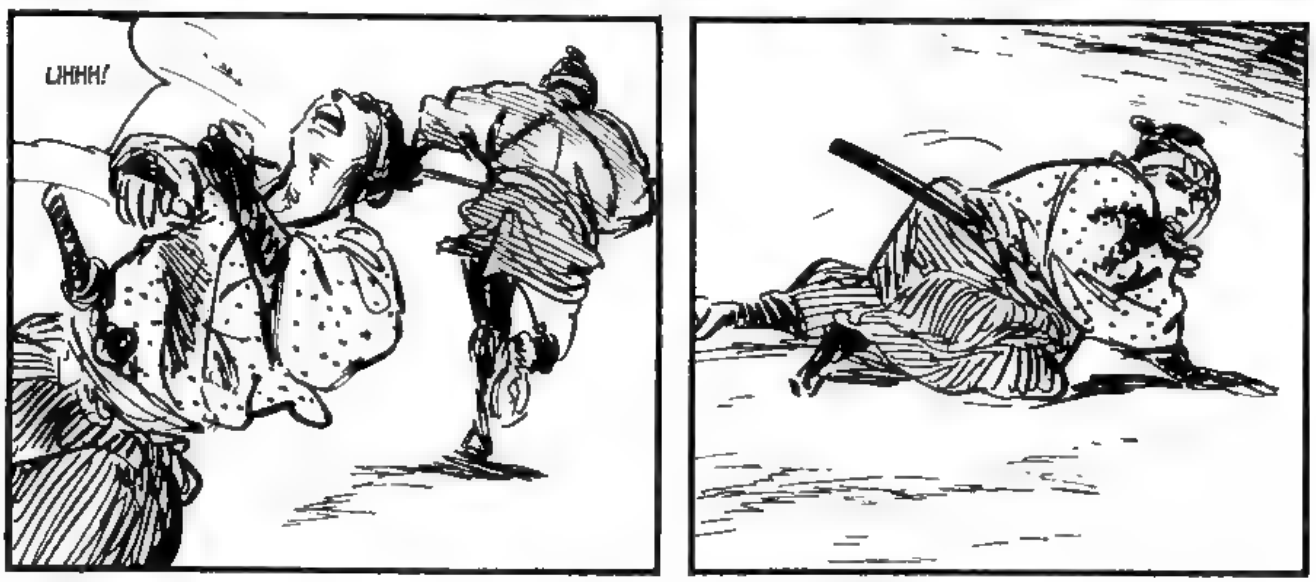
奉行所
御用
COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

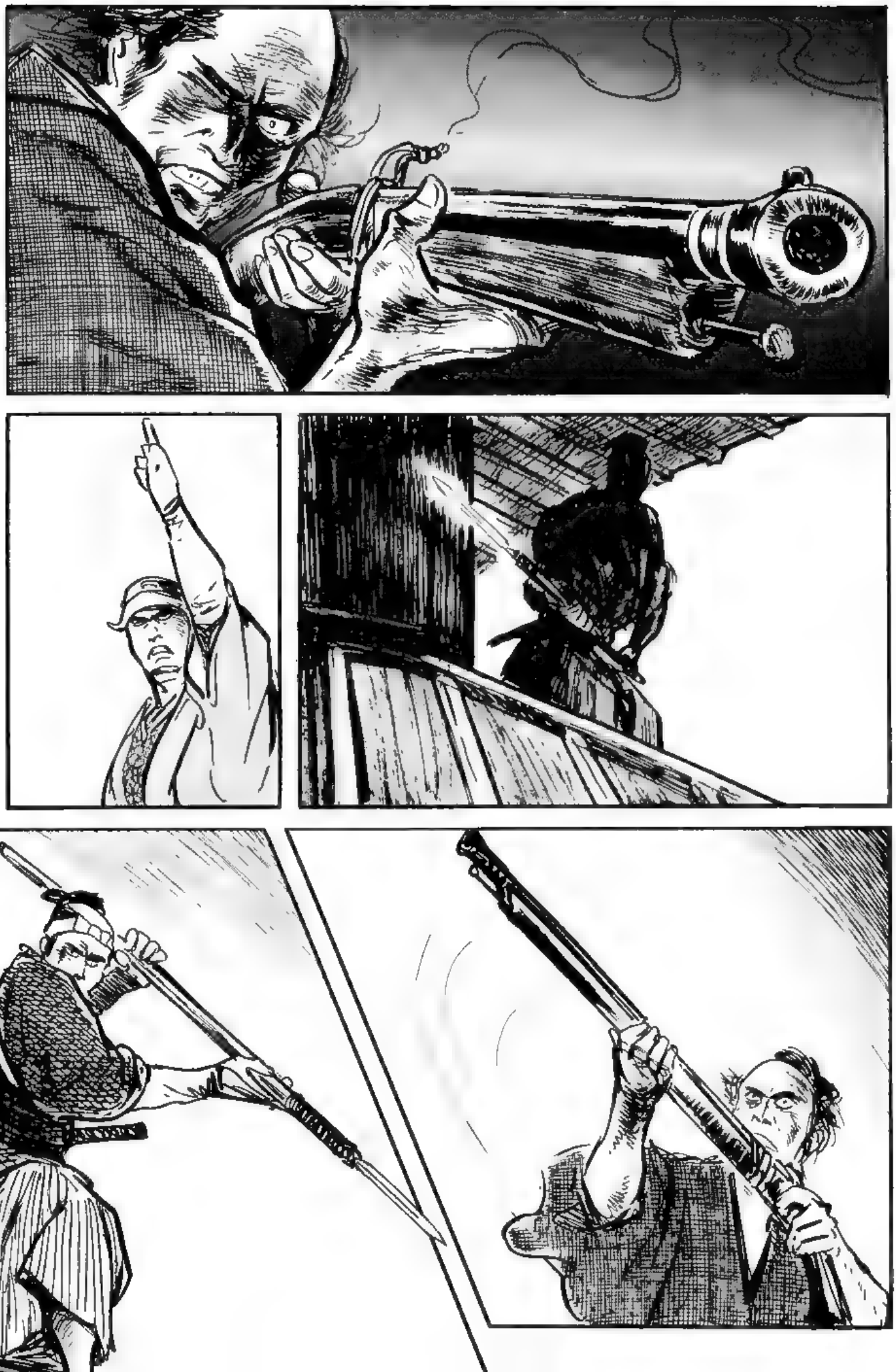




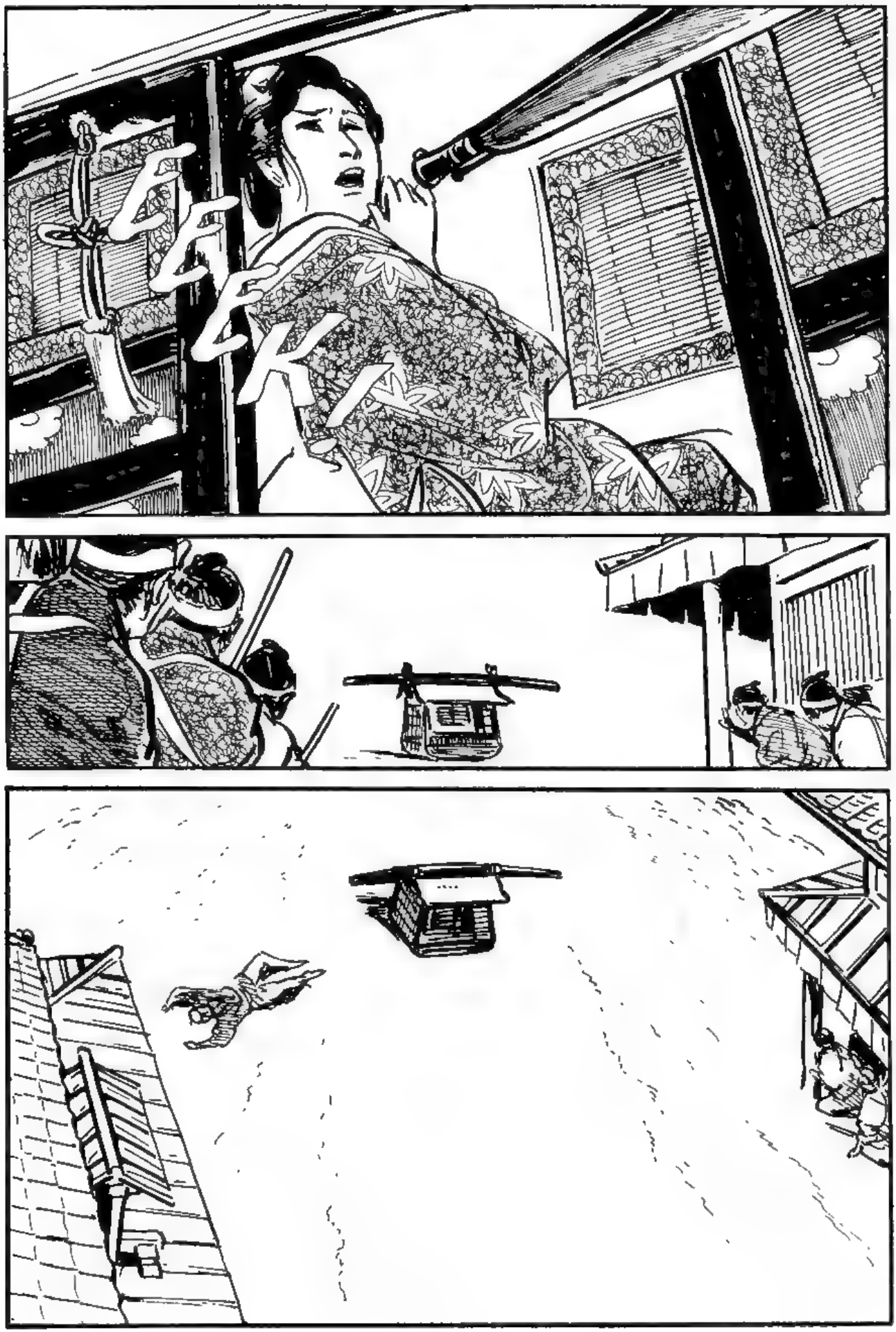
MATSUBA-YA
WHOLESALERS
諸色問屋
松葉屋

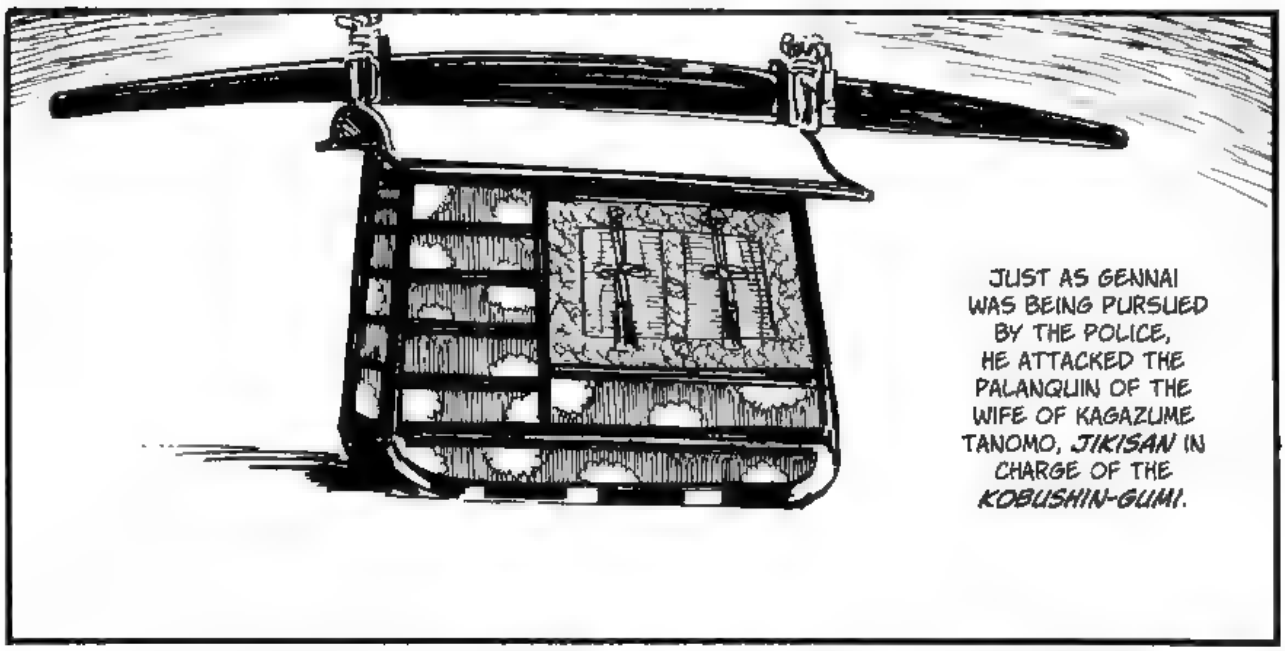

OH!
BOOM!


UHHH!

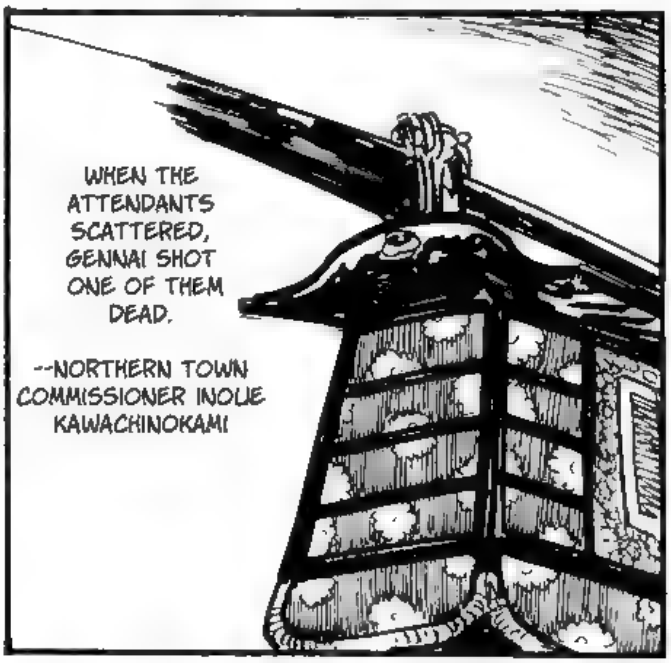


AAAH!
I AIN'T MESSIN' AROUND!
I'M GONNA KILL THE LADY IN THE PALANQUIN!
EEEEK!


EEEK!


JUST AS GENNAI WAS BEING PURSUED BY THE POLICE, HE ATTACKED THE PALANQUIN OF THE WIFE OF KAGAZUME TANOMO, *JIKISAN* IN CHARGE OF THE *KOBUSHIN-GUMI*.

HE TOOK EVERYONE HOSTAGE, PALANQUIN AND ALL.


WHEN THE ATTENDANTS SCATTERED, GENNAI SHOT ONE OF THEM DEAD.
--NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER INOUE KAWACHINOKAMI

GENNAI! LISTEN UP!
WHY CONTINUE KILLING PEOPLE FOR NO REASON? GIVE UP YOUR GUN AND COME OUT!
THE SHŌGUN HIMSELF MIGHT HAVE MERCY ON YOU... DEPENDING ON YOUR *ATTITUDE*.

SHADDUP!
HMPH!
IF I OPEN FIRE HERE NEAR EDO CASTLE, YOU JUST SAW WHAT WILL HAPPEN.
I COULD SEND FIVE OR SIX PEOPLE TO THE *OTHER* WORLD FOR GOOD.
I AIN'T GONNA DIE.
I-IF THAT'S THE CASE, RELEASE THE HOSTAGES. THEY'VE GOT NOTHING TO DO WITH *YOU*.

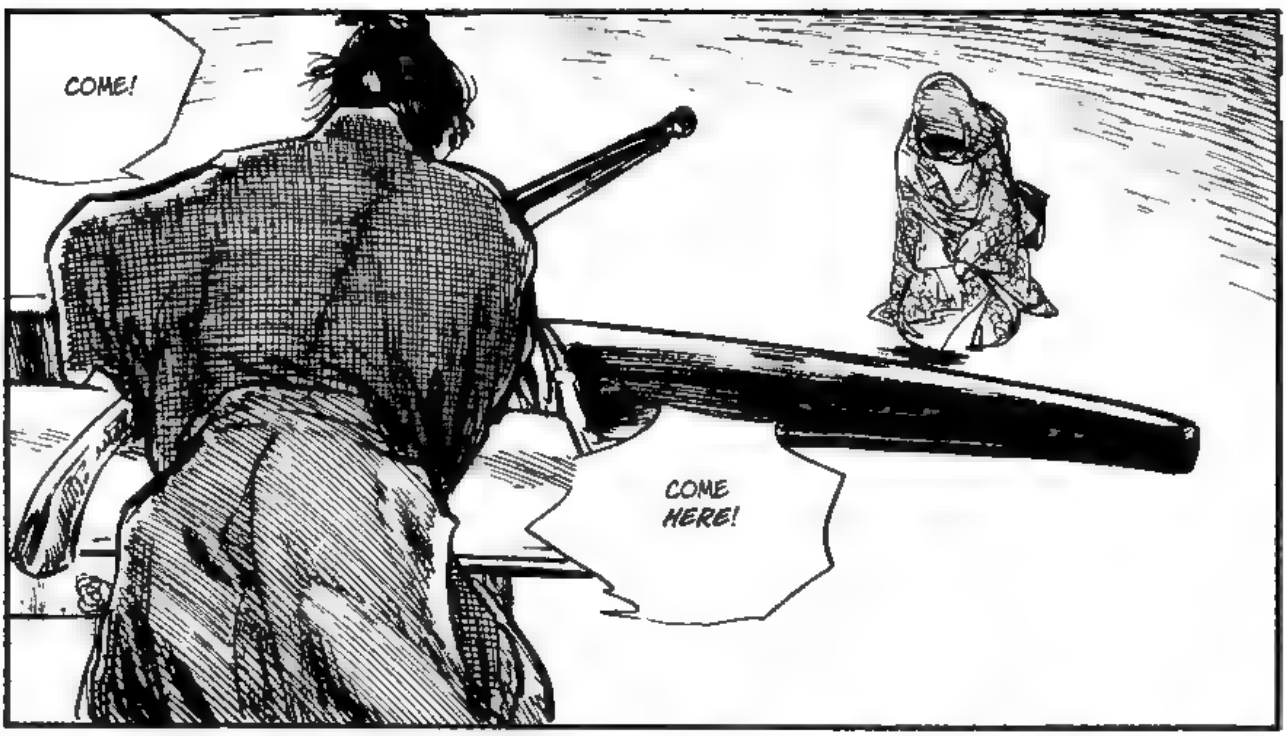
W-WELL, THEN, BRING OUT SOMEBODY WHO *DOES*--MINE, DAUGHTER OF KIMURA SONBEE, HEAD OF THE *ASHIGARU*!
ALL THIS IS *HER* FAULT! I'D RISK MY *LIFE* TO LOVE HER, BUT SHE GAVE ME THE *COLD SHOULDER*! IN THE END THEY ALL *TORMENTED* ME!
CAN'T YOU LET ME SEE HER *FACE TO FACE*?!
DO IT, AND I'LL EXCHANGE HER FOR THIS LADY!
YOU *FOOL*! YOU THINK WE'LL DO WHAT *YOU* WANT?!
AAARGH!!
BANG!!
GNNN!!

BRING MINĒ OUT!
IF YOU DON'T, I'M GONNA KILL THIS LADY!
BRING MINĒ OUT!
MINĒE!!

IT'S DANGEROUS HERE! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?!

IS THAT YOU, MINÉ?!
OH, MINÉ, IT'S TOO LATE TO ASK FOR MY FORGIVENESS!

I'M GONNA KILL YOU, AND THEN I'M GONNA DIE!


COME!
COME HERE!

MI... MINĒ!
MI... MINĒ!
MI...MINĒ!!

I CAN'T LET YOU DIE ALONE!
I'M GONNA SHOOT YOU AND THEN I'M GONNA DIE TOO!
BANG!

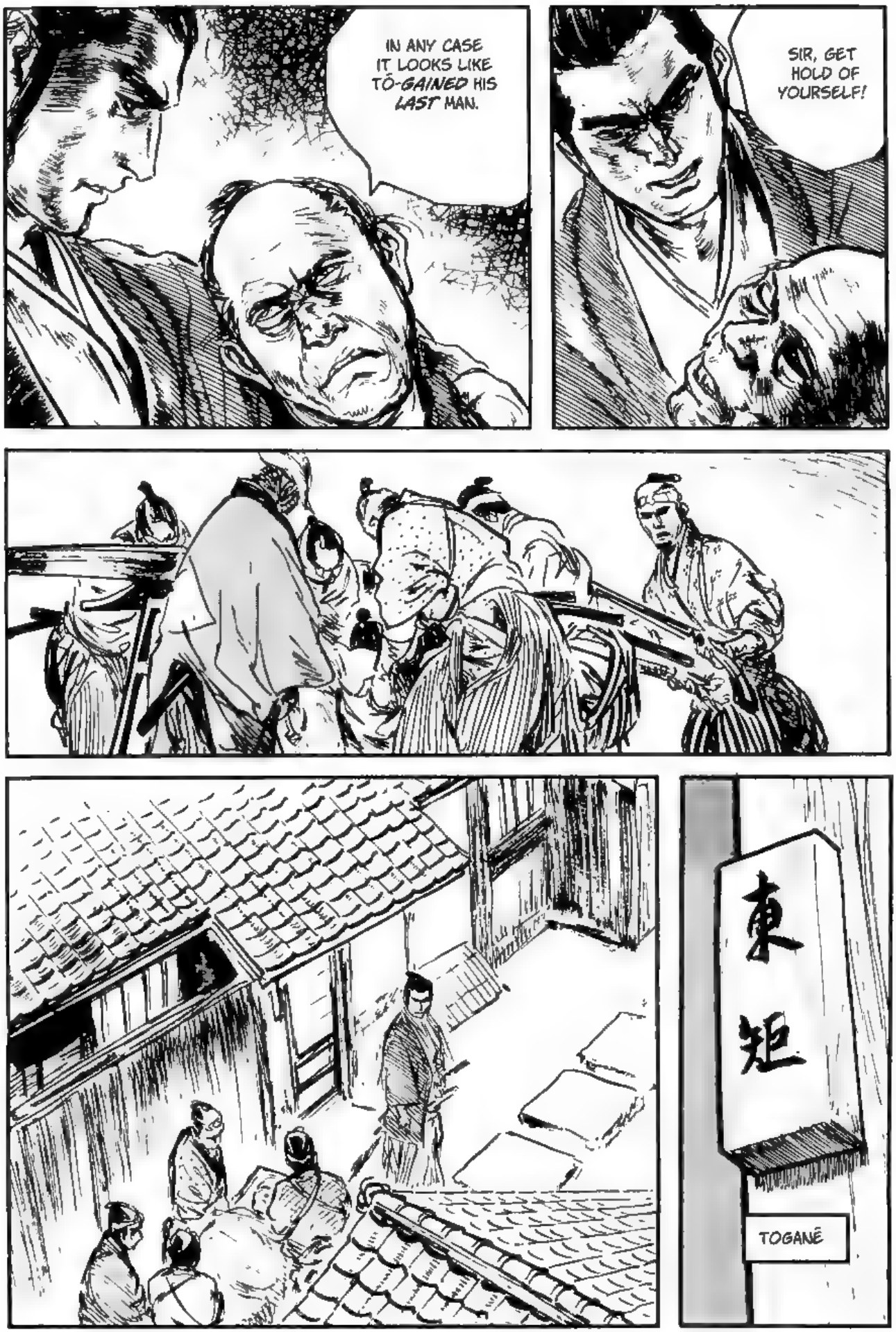
MINÉ!

MI...
MINÉ!
AARGH!

GWHHH!
GAAAG!

GUH!

SIR!
UH...IT'S NOTHING...
I MUST'VE LOOKED LIKE A FEMALE IMPERSONATOR WAGGING HER TAIL AS SHE RUNS AWAY ON STAGE.
YOU USED THE *"HEART SHADOW"* TECHNIQUE! YOU BROUGHT HIS HEART'S DESIRE TO LIFE TO CATCH HIM...
BUT...I DIDN'T THINK HE'D SHOOT ME *FIRST* AND *THEN* APPROACH ME.


IN ANY CASE IT LOOKS LIKE TŌ-GAINED HIS LAST MAN.
SIR, GET HOLD OF YOURSELF!
東矩
TOGANÉ

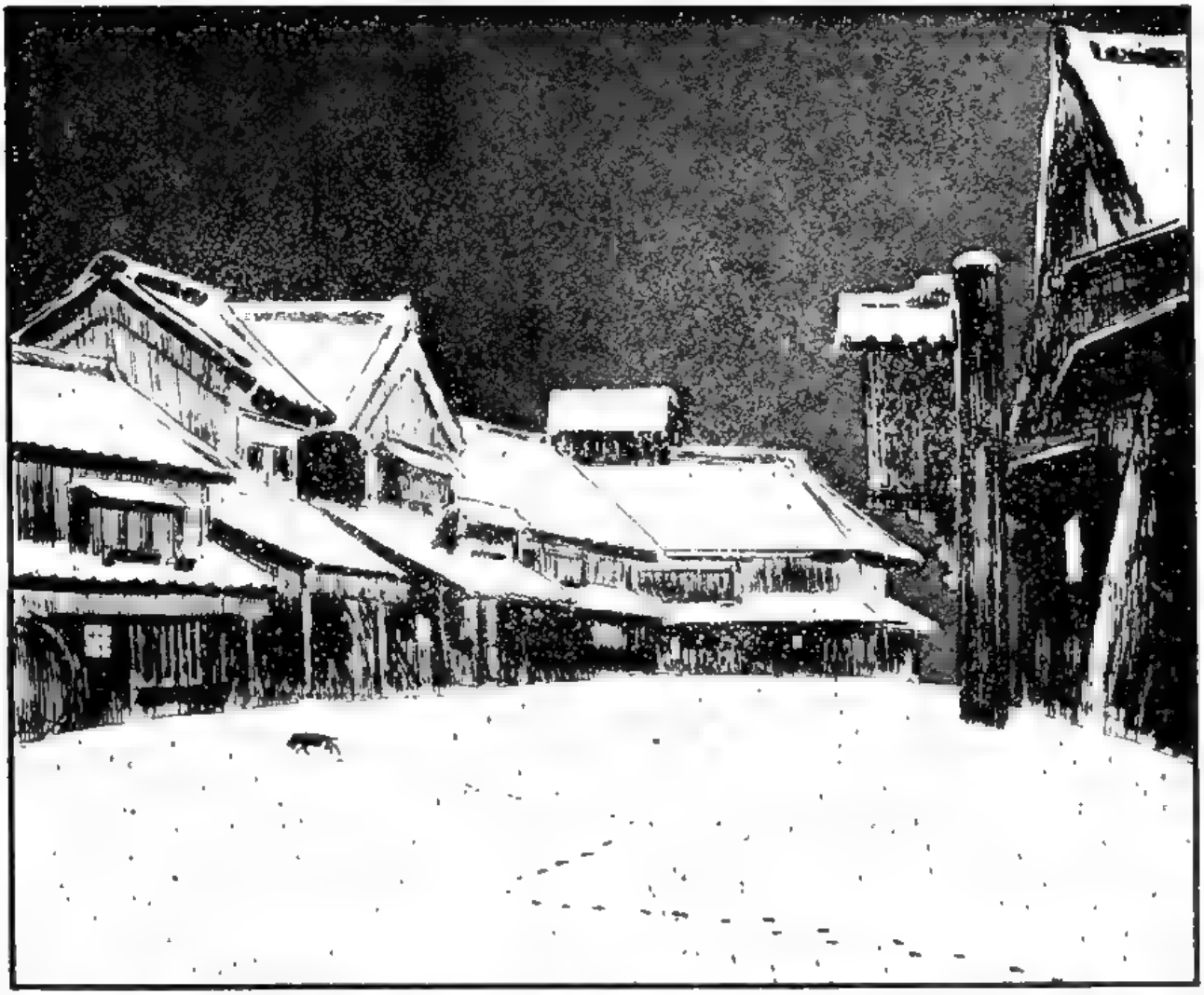
NOTHING CAN SAVE ME NOW.
IT'S 'CAUSE I KNOW MY BODY BEST...I'VE HAD IT FOR SIXTY YEARS.
HEAD-CHOPPER! THERE'S SOMETHING I WANT TO TELL YOU. SORRY, BUT CAN YOU GET EVERYONE ELSE TO LEAVE?

HEAD-
CHOPPER,
I...

I'VE BEEN MAKING BUSTS FOR FORTY-ONE YEARS... NOT FOR THE PRESTIGE OF THE SHŌGUN, NOT FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE LAW, NOT FOR THE SAFETY OF THE PEOPLE, BUT FOR *ME* AND *MYSELF ALONE*.
SIR! DON'T TALK TOO MUCH!
NAH..I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO TELL YOU AND ONLY *YOU*. I WANT TO FINISH OUR ARGUMENT.
YOU SAID THAT IT WAS A *JITTE* MAN'S DUTY TO *PREVENT* CRIMES, AND THAT TO WAIT UNTIL A CRIME WAS COMMITTED WOULD BE THE SAME AS COMMITTING IT. AND YOU WERE *RIGHT*.
BUT I *ENJOYED* WAITING FOR CRIMES TO BE COMMITTED SO I COULD MAKE AN ARREST.

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?
IT'S TRUE!
I ENJOYED BUSTING CROOKS FOR THE SAKE OF MY OWN LIFE. WHY WOULD I HAVE WANTED TO PREVENT CRIME? I NEVER ENCOURAGED CRIME, BUT IF I FELT THAT A LITTLE CRIME COULD GROW INTO SOMETHING MORE, I WAS HAPPY TO WAIT.
AND WHEN IT BLOSSOMED, I'D BUST 'EM, AND IT'D BE TO MY CREDIT.
THAT'S WHY I TOLD YOU THAT MY ARRESTS WERE FOR NO ONE ELSE BUT ME.
IT LOOKED LIKE I WAS GONNA DIE IN THE LINE OF DUTY WITHOUT TELLING THIS TO ANYONE, BUT...I COULDN'T FOOL YOU BY PRETENDING TO BE JUST ANOTHER JITTE MAN. YOU'RE TOO PURE.

TODAY'S NEW YEAR'S EVE.
EVERY YEAR ON NEW YEAR'S EVE US CONSTABLES WOULD HAVE TO GET TOGETHER AT THE HOUSE OF OUR LIEUTENANT.



"YOU MAY BE AN OFFICIAL SWORD TESTER, BUT YOU'RE ALSO A *RŌNIN*, SO YOU'D *NEVER* UNDERSTAND... WHEN FAMILIES WOULD GET TOGETHER AND EAT SOBA, WE CONSTABLES WOULD HAVE TO SERVE AT OUR LIEUTENANT'S HOUSE."

NEXT!

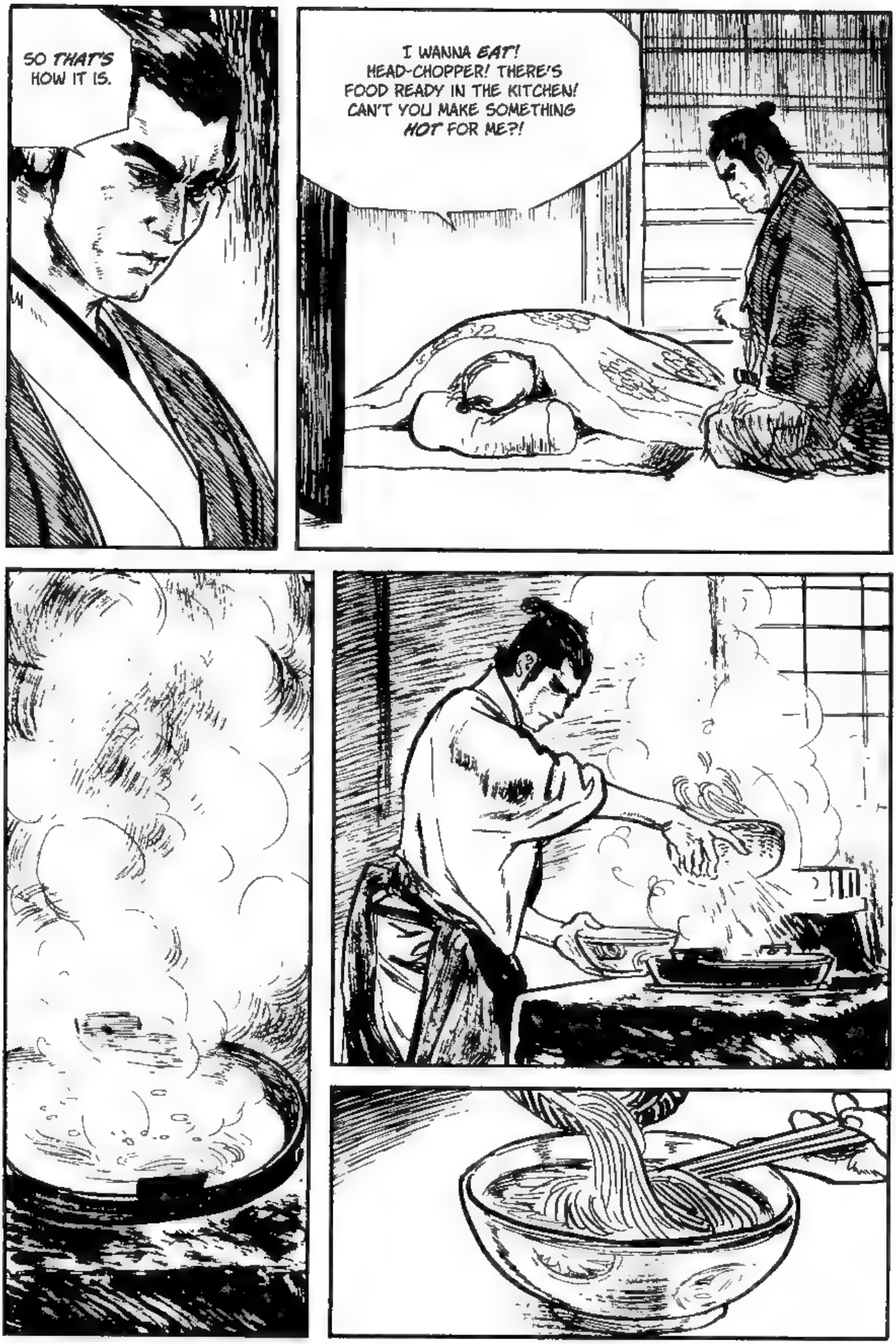
NEXT!
YAJIRŌ, YOU'VE DONE A GOOD JOB THIS YEAR FOR A MAN OF *YOUR* AGE.
YOU MAY SERVE *ANOTHER YEAR.*
YES, SIR.

I MADE ARRESTS JUST FOR THOSE FIVE LITTLE WORDS: "YOU MAY SERVE ANOTHER YEAR."
IF I DIDN'T MAKE ENOUGH ARRESTS, MY CAREER WOULD BE *OVER*. IT'D BE *STRANGE* TO HAVE AN OLD GUY LIKE ME AS A CONSTABLE.

ALL US CONSTABLES SERVE ONLY FOR *ONE-YEAR* PERIODS. *YOU* WOULDN'T KNOW THAT. A LOW-RANKING RETAINER ONLY GETS A STIPEND OF THIRTY BAGS OF RICE FOR JUST ONE GENERATION. AND IF THEY *AREN'T* TOLD, "YOU MAY SERVE ANOTHER YEAR," EVEN IF THEY'RE *JIKISAN*... IT MAKES ME *CRY*.

THERE ARE TOO MANY GUYS WITHOUT POSTS.
"IT'S FREEZING COLD ON NEW YEAR'S EVE... I MADE ARRESTS SO I COULD *KEEP* MY JOB *YEAR* AFTER *YEAR!*
"I HAD NO CHOICE IF I WANTED TO SERVE ANOTHER YEAR.
"I HAVE NO FAMILY. I *COULDN'T* LIVE WITHOUT MY JOB.
"IT'S BECAUSE I MADE ARRESTS FOR *MY OWN* SAKE...TO KEEP MYSELF *ALIVE* ..THAT I NEVER GOT MARRIED... THAT PEOPLE INSULT ME AS "TŌ-GAINS HIS MAN."
"THE OLDER I GOT, THE MORE ARRESTS I HAD TO MAKE!

I KEPT MAKING ARRESTS...
AND IT *WASN'T* JUST ME. UNTIL THE SYSTEM'S CHANGED, NO ONE WILL BECOME A TRUE *JITTE* MAN OUT TO *PREVENT* CRIME.


SO THAT'S HOW IT IS.
I WANNA EAT! HEAD-CHOPPER! THERE'S FOOD READY IN THE KITCHEN! CAN'T YOU MAKE SOMETHING HOT FOR ME?!

NOT HAVING TO WAIT IN LINE AT THE LIEUTENANT'S HOUSE... EATING SOBA AT HOME... *THIS* IS HOW A CONSTABLE'S LIFE SHOULD END.
I ALWAYS WANTED TO TAKE MY TIME EATING YEAR-END NOODLES JUST *ONCE*... THOUGH I WAS JUST THINKING ABOUT THE FREEZING SKY... MY WISH HAS COME *TRUE*.

GOHHHNG
GOHHHNG
THESE ARE REALLY MY LIFE-END NOODLES...

GOHHHH

IN THE NAME OF BUDDHA...
HE'S HAD A GOOD LIFE. MAY HE BECOME A BUDDHA.
GOHHHNG

the twenty-first

Spark Umbrella

PWEEET
PWEEET

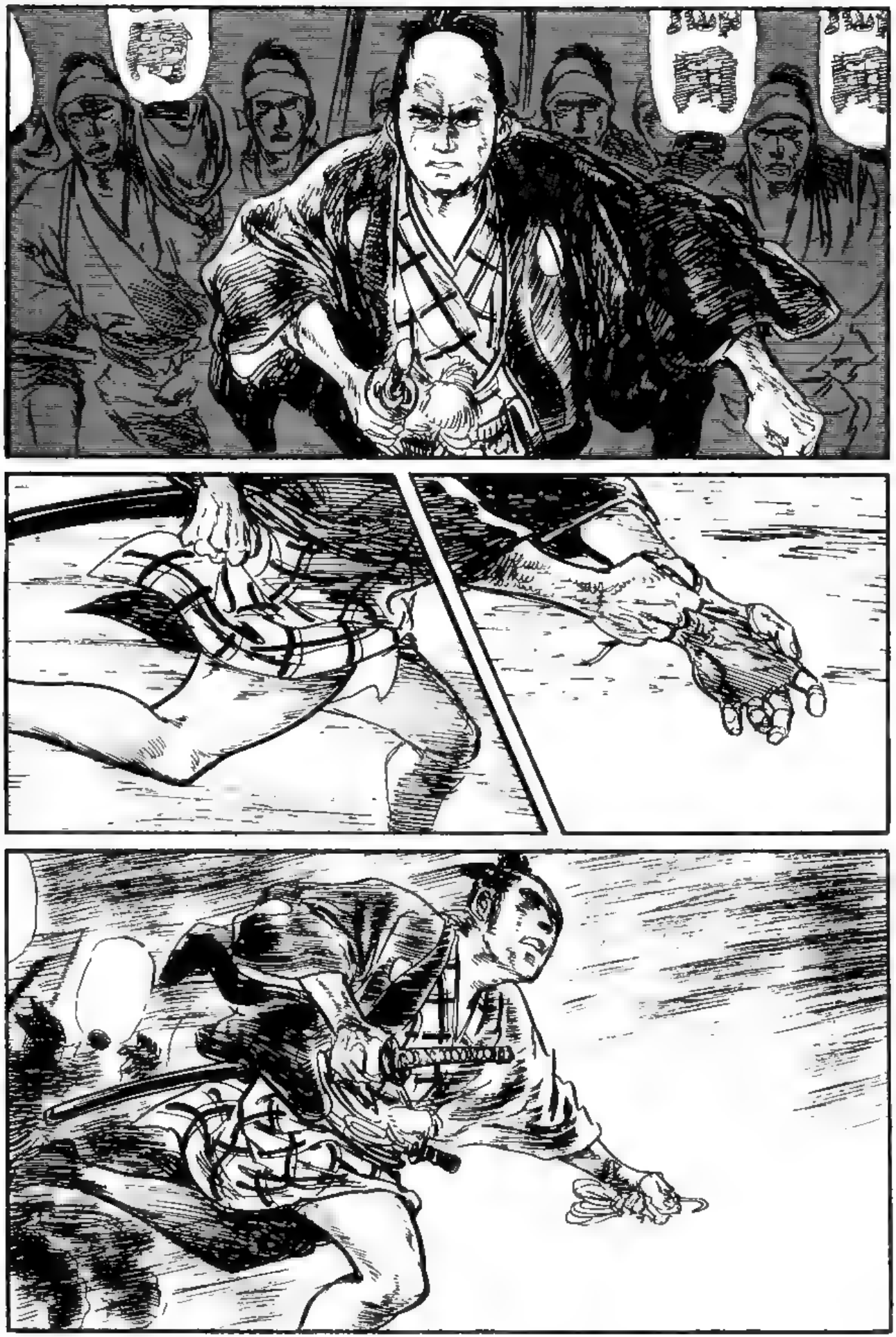
御用
御用
御用
御用
御用
御用

WILL O' THE WISP BENKICHI! YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!
RECEIVE THE ROPES!
AHHH, SHADDUP!
I MAY BE DESPERATE, BUT IF I'M GONNA HANG...
I'M GONNA TAKE ONE OR ALL OF YA TO HELL WITH ME!
YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!

WHOOSH
AAAH
DBZHHH

WHUNK!
WHAP!
OOF!
ARGH!
NOW I'LL SHOW YA!
PANT
PANT
PANT
PANT

YOU'RE UNDER...
ARREST!
御用
御用
御用
御用



YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!
AAAH!

GAAAH!
DBZHHH!
I'M TAKING YOU IN!

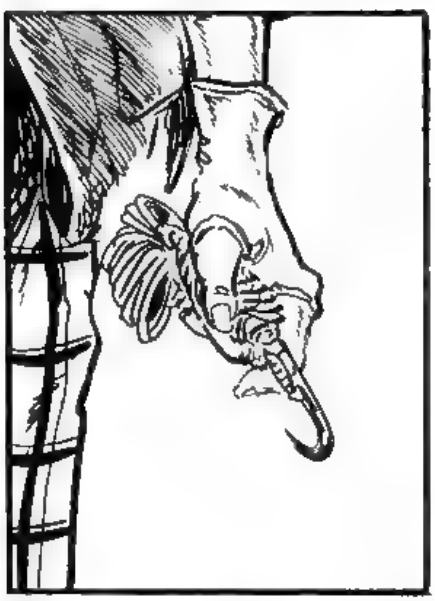
WHOOSH!
GASP!
THUD!
AAAH!

ARGH!
BWEEENG!
URGGG...
GOTCHA!

IT'S KASAJIRŌ!
THAT'S "CATCHER" KASAJIRŌ, MASTER OF THE HOOK AND ROPE!
WHADDAYA MEAN, "CATCHER"?
HE HOOKS HIS ROPE ONTO A MAT AND JUMPS INTO THE AIR.
HIS OPPONENT THINKS IT'S THE ROPE THAT'S FLYIN' AT HIM, BUT ONCE HE'S OFF GUARD, HE'S TIED UP BEFORE HE KNOWS IT!
HUH!
AND IT'S NOT JUST MATS. A TREE OR ANYTHING ELSE WILL DO. HE'LL HOOK ONTO WHATEVER'S AROUND HIM AND TAKE TO THE AIR. AMAZING.

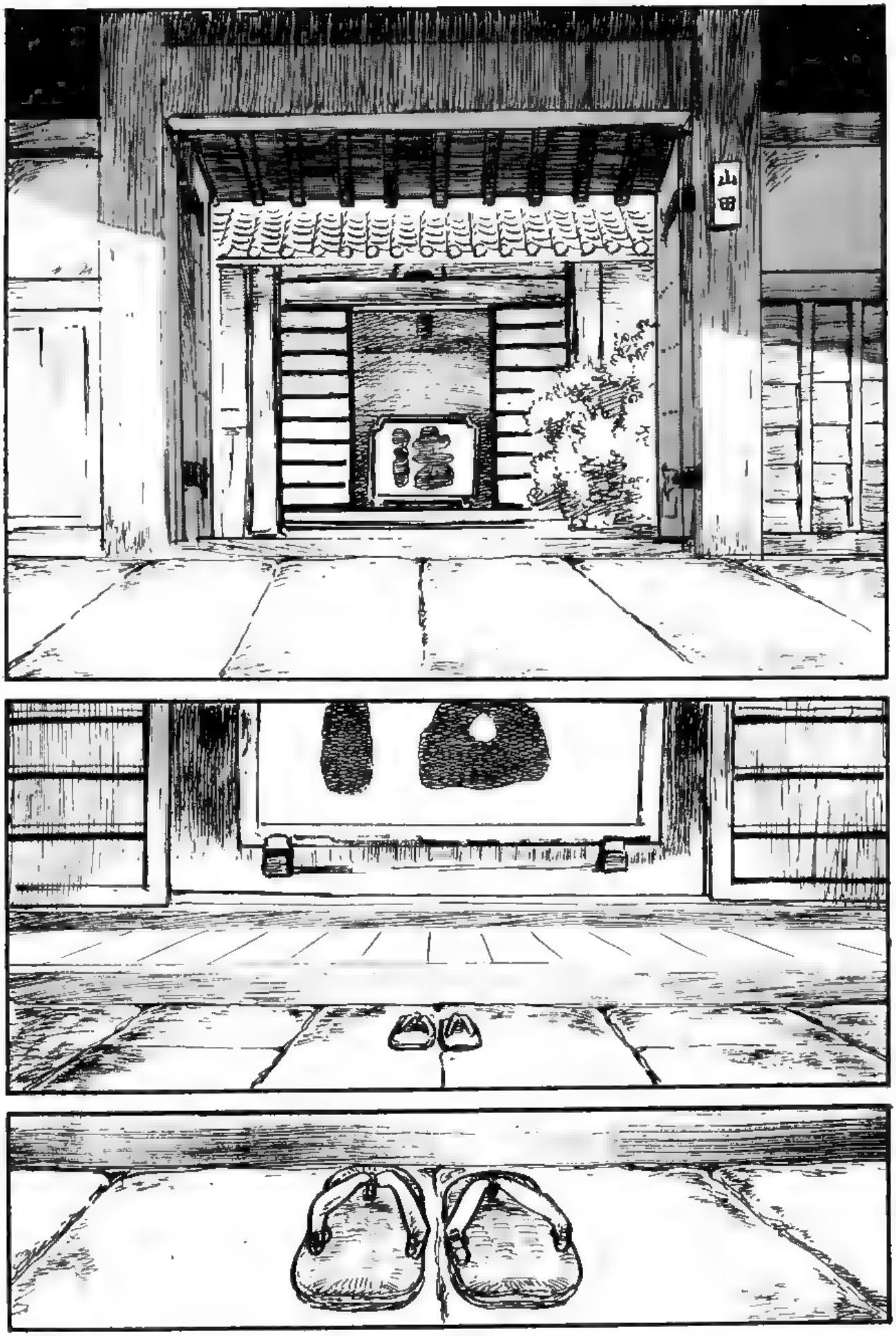
KASAJIRŌ SAVED THE DAUGHTER OF THE *SETTA* DEALER IN KOKU-*CHŌ*! HE HOOKED HIS ROPE ON THE RAILING OF A BRIDGE, SWUNG DOWN, AND SAVED HER!
KASAJIRŌ ALSO BUSTED AKIBA NO BUNSHICHI AND SAVED THE KIDS WHO HAD BEEN TAKEN HOSTAGE!
AND THEN LAST NIGHT HE CAUGHT WILL O' THE WISP BENKICHI!
THAT'S KASAJIRŌ, NOW EDO'S *NUMBER ONE* COP!
HE'S GOT A *HOSTAGE*!

AN EVIL *RONIN*'S IN THERE!
HE'S TAKEN A RICE MERCHANT'S
DAUGHTER *HOSTAGE*!
OUTTA MY WAY,
OUTTA MY WAY!



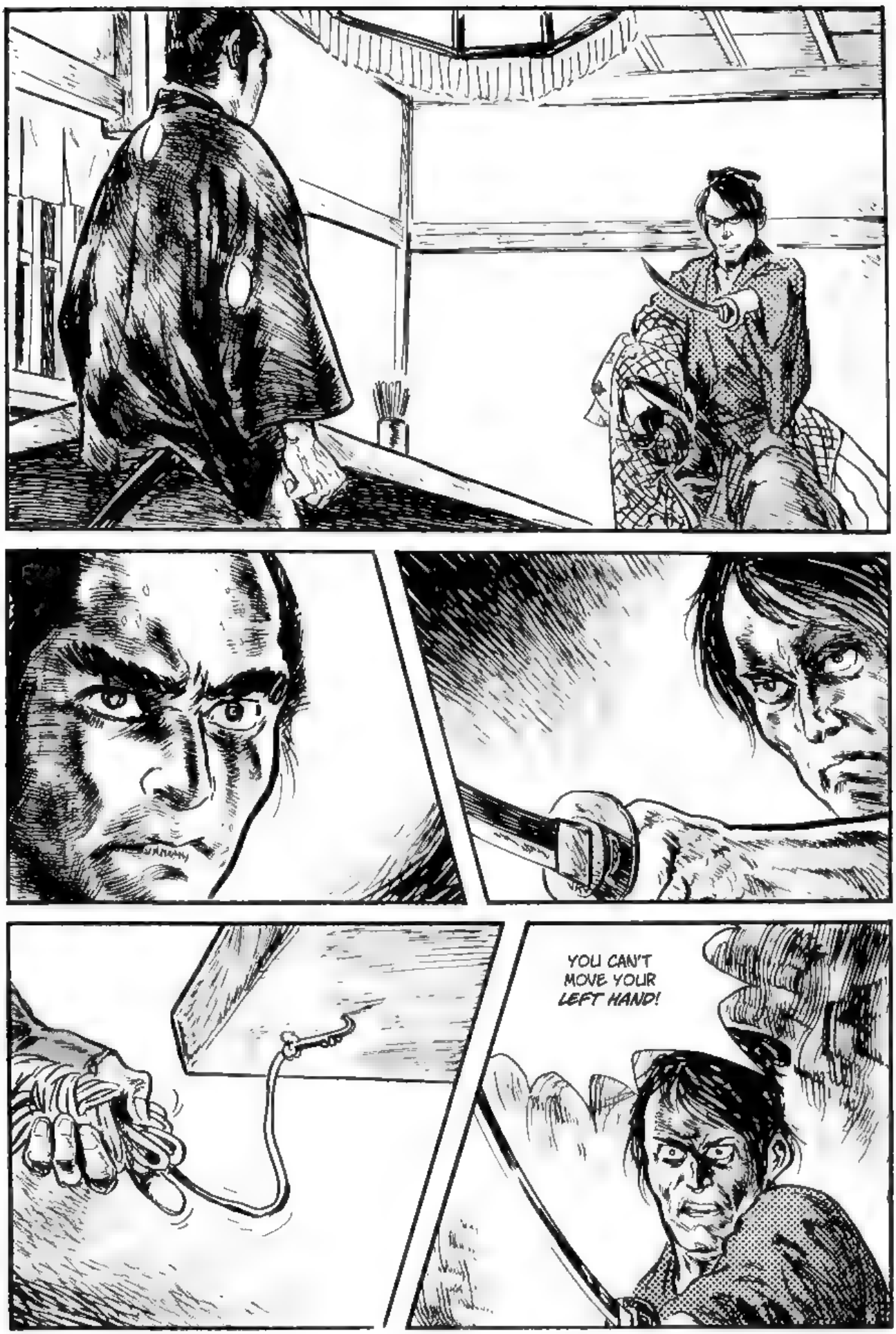
CLUNK

GET OUTTA HERE! COME ANY CLOSER, AN' I'LL KILL THE GIRL!
SO YOU'RE CATCHER KASAJIRŌ, HUH?
YOU'RE GONNA HOOK YOUR ROPE AN' COME FLYIN' AT ME, RIGHT?
THAT AIN'T GONNA WORK ON ME!


山田

HE SAW *RIGHT THROUGH ME.* I WAS *SWEATING WITH FEAR* WHEN HE POINTED HIS BLADE AT ME.
AND WHAT DID YOU DO NEXT?

WELL...


YOU CAN'T MOVE YOUR LEFT HAND!

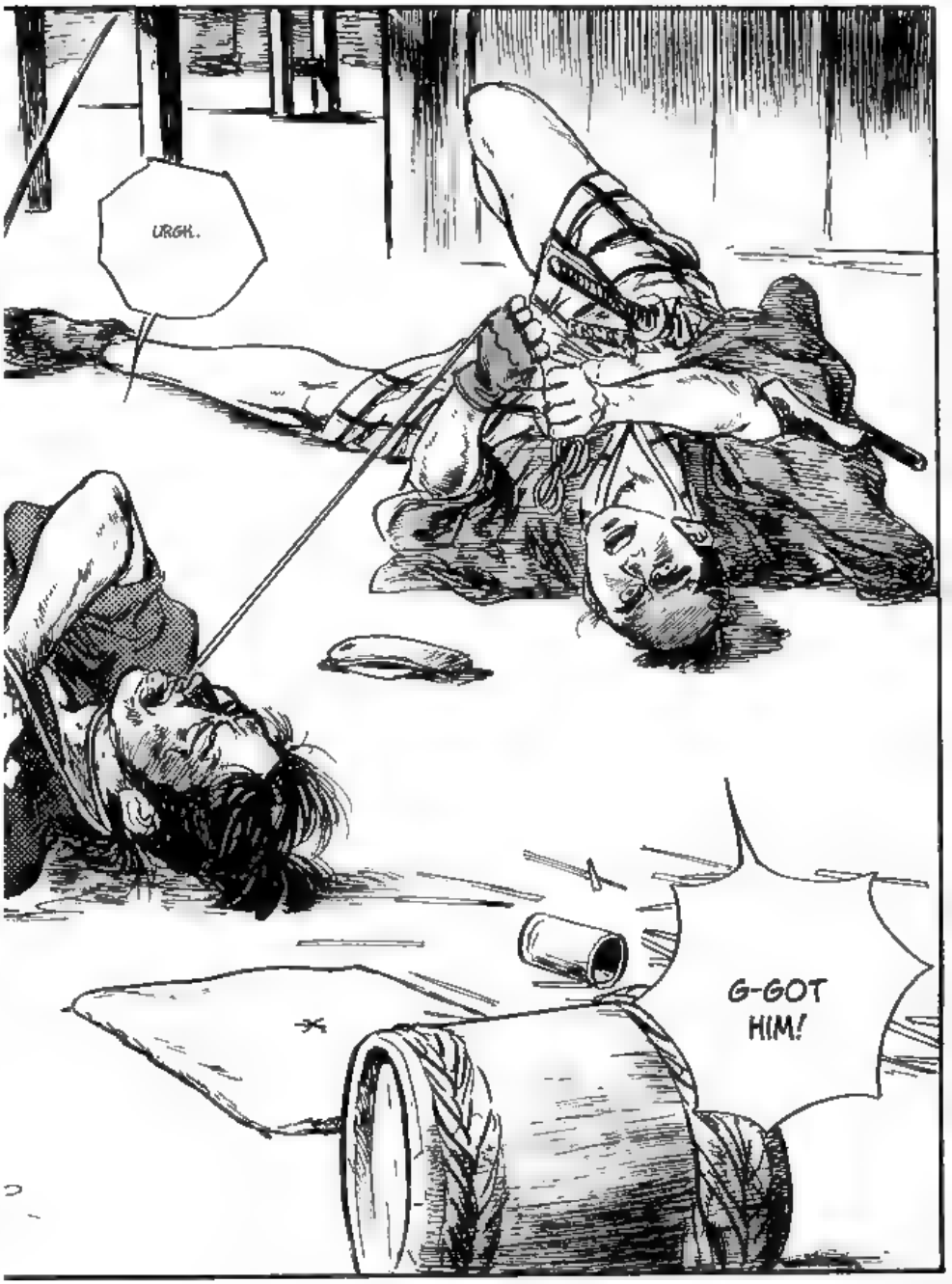
I KNOW YOU'VE GOT YOUR HOOK SET UP!
C'MON!
HEH HEH... AFTER I REST A WHILE, I CAN TAKE THE GIRL HOSTAGE AN' GET OUTTA HERE.
IF YOU WANT HER TO LIVE, YOU COPS'D BETTER NOT MAKE A MOVE!

TELL THOSE GUYS OUTSIDE! GOT IT?!
UH...
UNHOOK YOUR ROPE AND COME HERE!

AAAH!
Q-QUIET!
AAAH!
WHOOSH!

BWEENG!

AAAH!
WHOOMP!

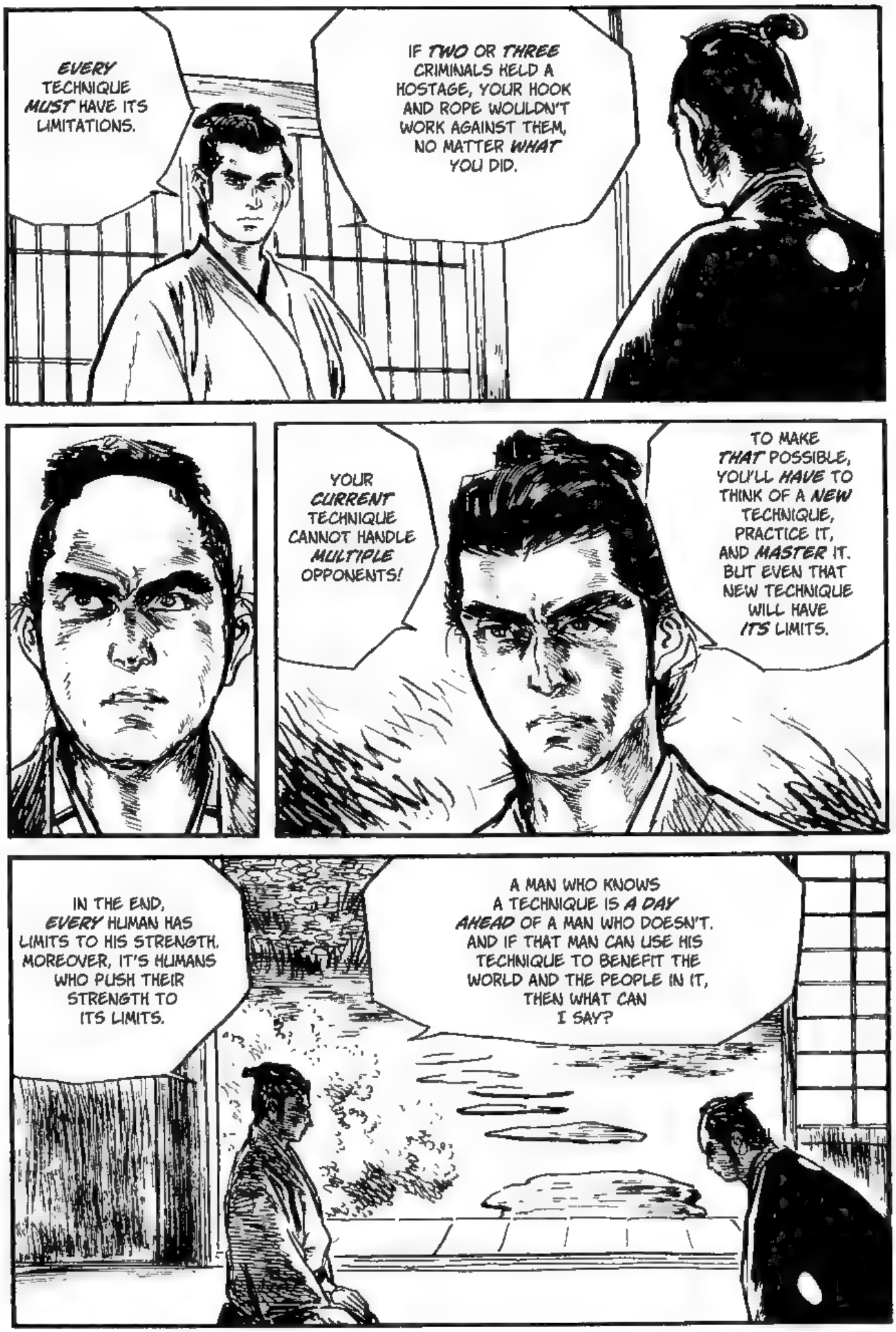

URGH.
G-GOT HIM!

THEN IF THE GIRL WHO HAD PASSED OUT HADN'T TURNED TO ME AND SCREAMED...

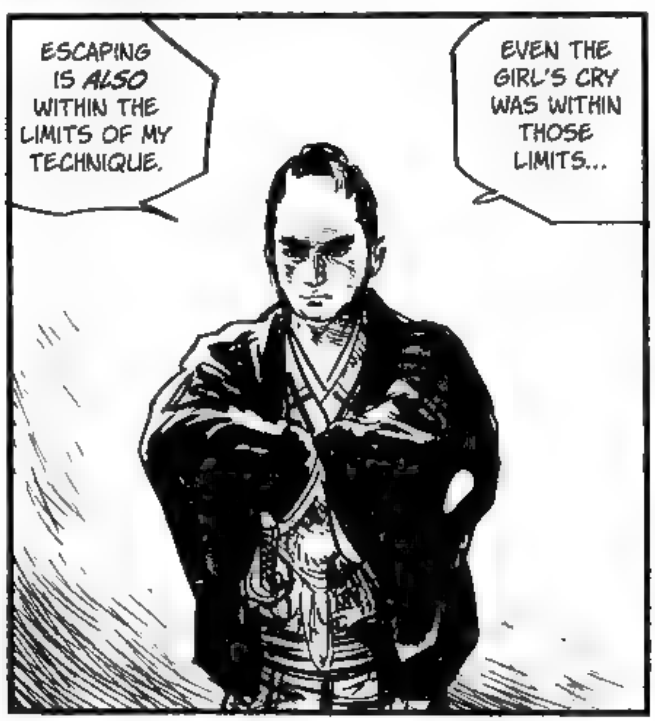
JUST *THINKING* ABOUT IT MAKES ME BREAK OUT IN *A COLD SWEAT*. I WAS REALLY SKATING ON *THIN ICE*.

YAMADA-*SAMA!*
YOU TAUGHT ME HOW TO CATCH CRIMINALS WITH A HOOK AND ROPE.

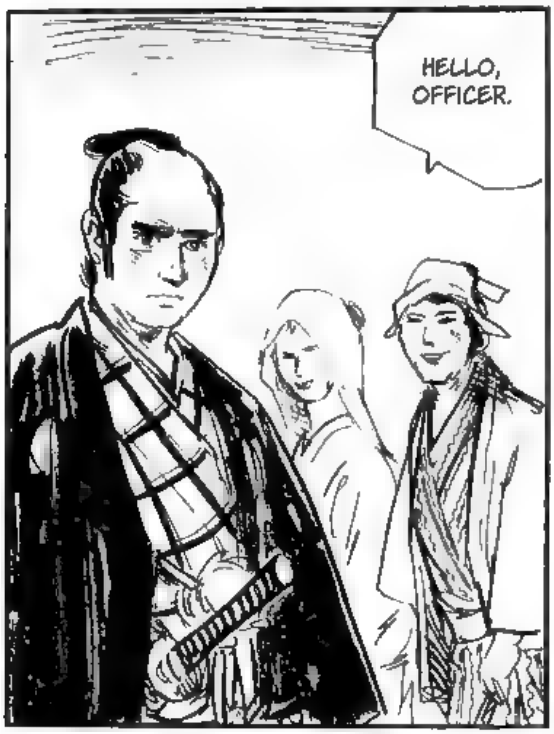
THE MORE PEOPLE I CATCH, THE MORE FAMOUS MY SKILL GETS. NOW *EVERYBODY* IN EDO KNOWS ABOUT IT. OF COURSE, EVEN THE *CRIMINALS* KNOW, AND THEY CAN GET *AHEAD* OF ME.
MAYBE I CAN'T USE THIS SKILL ANYMORE.
MAYBE I WENT THROUGH ALL THAT TROUBLE TO LEARN IT FOR *NOTHING!*
PLEASE TELL ME WHAT TO DO AGAIN!
I MAY BE A DECAPITATOR, BUT EVEN *I* CAN'T CUT OFF THE HEAD OF A MAN WITH AN IRON RING AROUND HIS NECK!


EVERY TECHNIQUE MUST HAVE ITS LIMITATIONS.
IF TWO OR THREE CRIMINALS HELD A HOSTAGE, YOUR HOOK AND ROPE WOULDN'T WORK AGAINST THEM, NO MATTER WHAT YOU DID.
YOUR CURRENT TECHNIQUE CANNOT HANDLE MULTIPLE OPPONENTS!
TO MAKE THAT POSSIBLE, YOU'LL HAVE TO THINK OF A NEW TECHNIQUE, PRACTICE IT, AND MASTER IT. BUT EVEN THAT NEW TECHNIQUE WILL HAVE ITS LIMITS.
IN THE END, EVERY HUMAN HAS LIMITS TO HIS STRENGTH. MOREOVER, IT'S HUMANS WHO PUSH THEIR STRENGTH TO ITS LIMITS.
A MAN WHO KNOWS A TECHNIQUE IS A DAY AHEAD OF A MAN WHO DOESN'T. AND IF THAT MAN CAN USE HIS TECHNIQUE TO BENEFIT THE WORLD AND THE PEOPLE IN IT, THEN WHAT CAN I SAY?

ITANE-DONO, THERE'S A WORD CALLED "ADAPTATION"! OBSERVE YOUR SITUATION AND USE THE APPROPRIATE TECHNIQUE!
DON'T THINK OF YOUR TECHNIQUE AS THE SUM OF WHO YOU ARE. AND DON'T RELY ON YOUR TECHNIQUE. IF YOU MEET SOMEONE WHOSE SKILL IS SUPERIOR TO YOURS, OF COURSE HE'LL BLOCK YOUR TECHNIQUE.
AT MOMENTS LIKE THOSE, OBSERVE YOUR SITUATION AND DECIDE WHETHER YOU CAN USE YOUR TECHNIQUE.
ESCAPING IS ALSO WITHIN THE LIMITS OF YOUR TECHNIQUE.
BASE YOUR JUDGMENT ENTIRELY ON THE VALUE OF THE LIVES OF OTHERS.
AS A RESULT OF THAT GIRL'S CRY, YOU BROUGHT YOUR TECHNIQUE TO LIFE. THINK ABOUT THAT.


ESCAPING IS *ALSO* WITHIN THE LIMITS OF MY TECHNIQUE.
EVEN THE GIRL'S CRY WAS WITHIN THOSE LIMITS...

THE *LIMITS* OF MY TECHNIQUE?


HELLO, OFFICER.

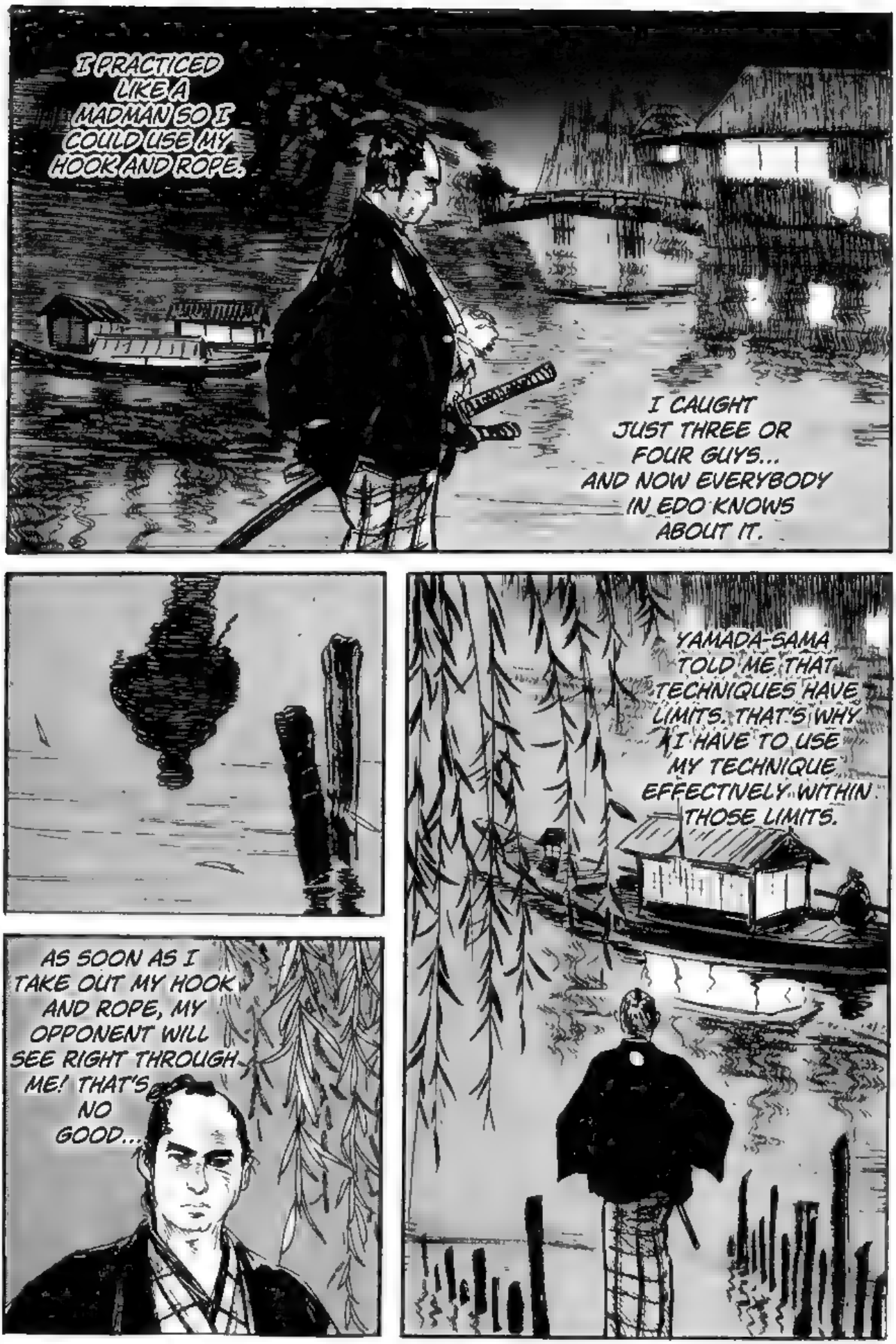
GOOD EVENING, SIR.

?!

OH, GOOD EVENING, SIR!

MY FATHER WANTED ME TO BECOME A MAN WHO COULD BECOME AN UMBRELLA FOR THE PEOPLE...
SHIELDING THEM AGAINST THE "RAIN" OF OTHERS... PROTECTING THEIR LIVES. THAT'S WHY HE NAMED ME KASAJIRŌ--SECOND SON OF THE UMBRELLA...

BUT I COULDN'T OPEN SUCH AN UMBRELLA. JUST HOLDING IT UP REQUIRES ALL MY MIGHT. I DON'T HAVE ANY STRENGTH LEFT TO DEFEND ANYONE ELSE.


I PRACTICED LIKE A MADMAN SO I COULD USE MY HOOK AND ROPE.
I CAUGHT JUST THREE OR FOUR GUYS... AND NOW EVERYBODY IN EDO KNOWS ABOUT IT.
YAMADA-SAMA TOLD ME THAT TECHNIQUES HAVE LIMITS. THAT'S WHY I HAVE TO USE MY TECHNIQUE EFFECTIVELY WITHIN THOSE LIMITS.
AS SOON AS I TAKE OUT MY HOOK AND ROPE, MY OPPONENT WILL SEE RIGHT THROUGH ME! THAT'S NO GOOD...

IF THEY SEE THROUGH ME, THERE GOES MY TECHNIQUE! I CAN'T USE IT ANYMORE... EVEN IF I THINK IT *IS* USEFUL WITHIN ITS BOUNDS...
IT'D BE *TOTALLY* USELESS... IT'D BE AS IF I *NEVER* HAD IT *AT ALL*...

川善
屋

HE TOLD ME THAT ESCAPING WAS ALSO WITHIN THE LIMITS OF MY TECHNIQUE... BUT WHAT DID HE MEAN BY THAT?! I CAN'T FIGURE IT OUT...

IF I RUN AWAY FROM THE START, I CAN'T USE MY TECHNIQUE. AND IF I PRETEND TO RUN AWAY, I CAN'T USE MY TECHNIQUE TOO WELL...

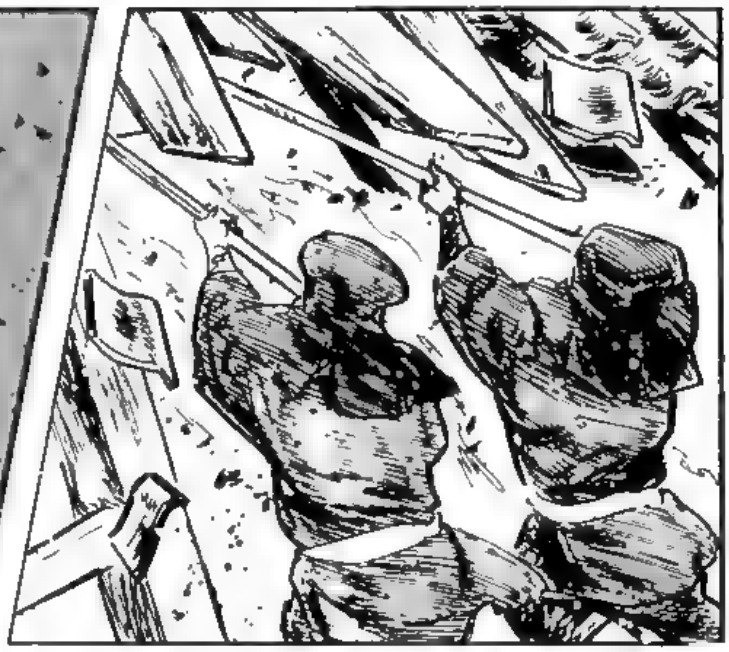
FIRE!!
F-FIRE!
AAAH!
EEEK!

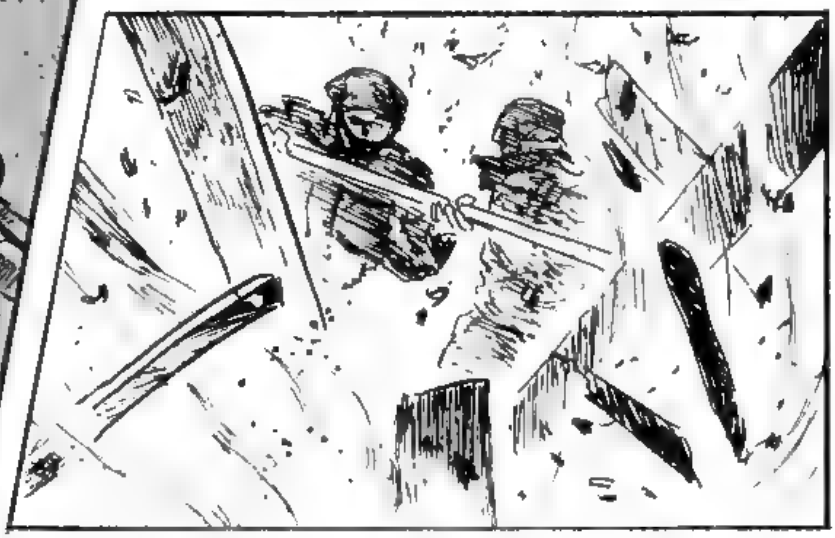
RRRNNN!
JJJRRRNNN!
JJJRRRNNN!
JJJRRRNNN!
JJJRRRNNN!
JJJRRRNNN!
JJJRRRNNN!
JJJRRRNNN!
JJJRRRNNN!

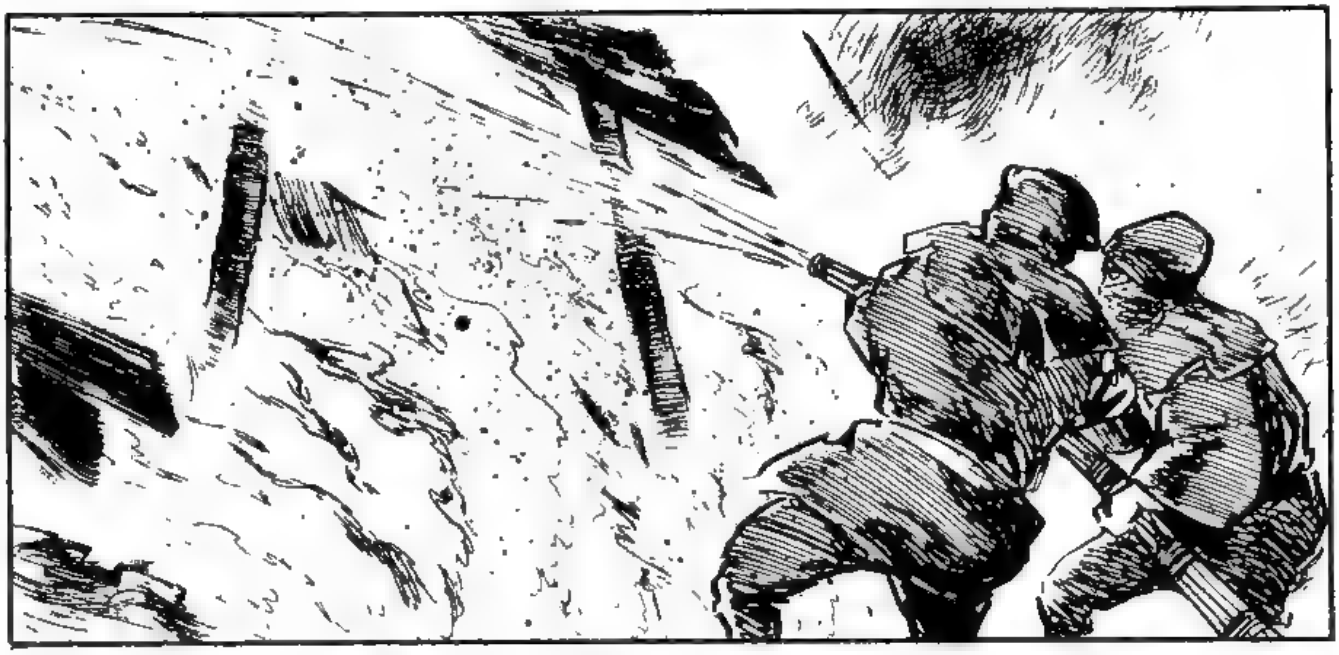
OUTTA
OUR WAY!
に組
に組

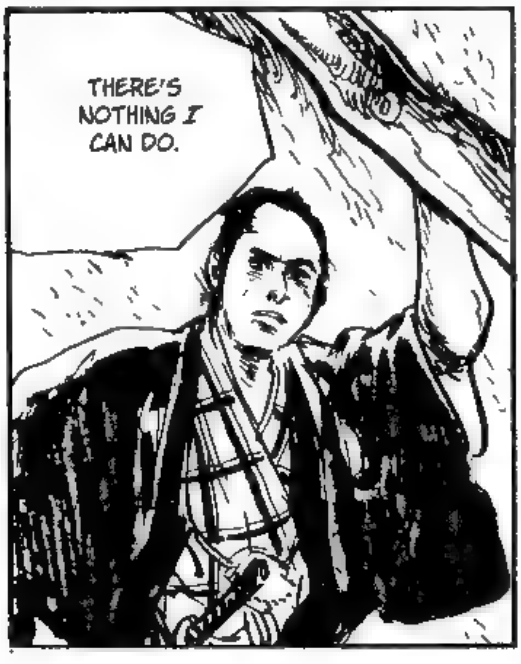
OUTTA OUR WAY!
OUTTA OUR WAY!
は組

RRRROARRR!
RRRRRRRRRR

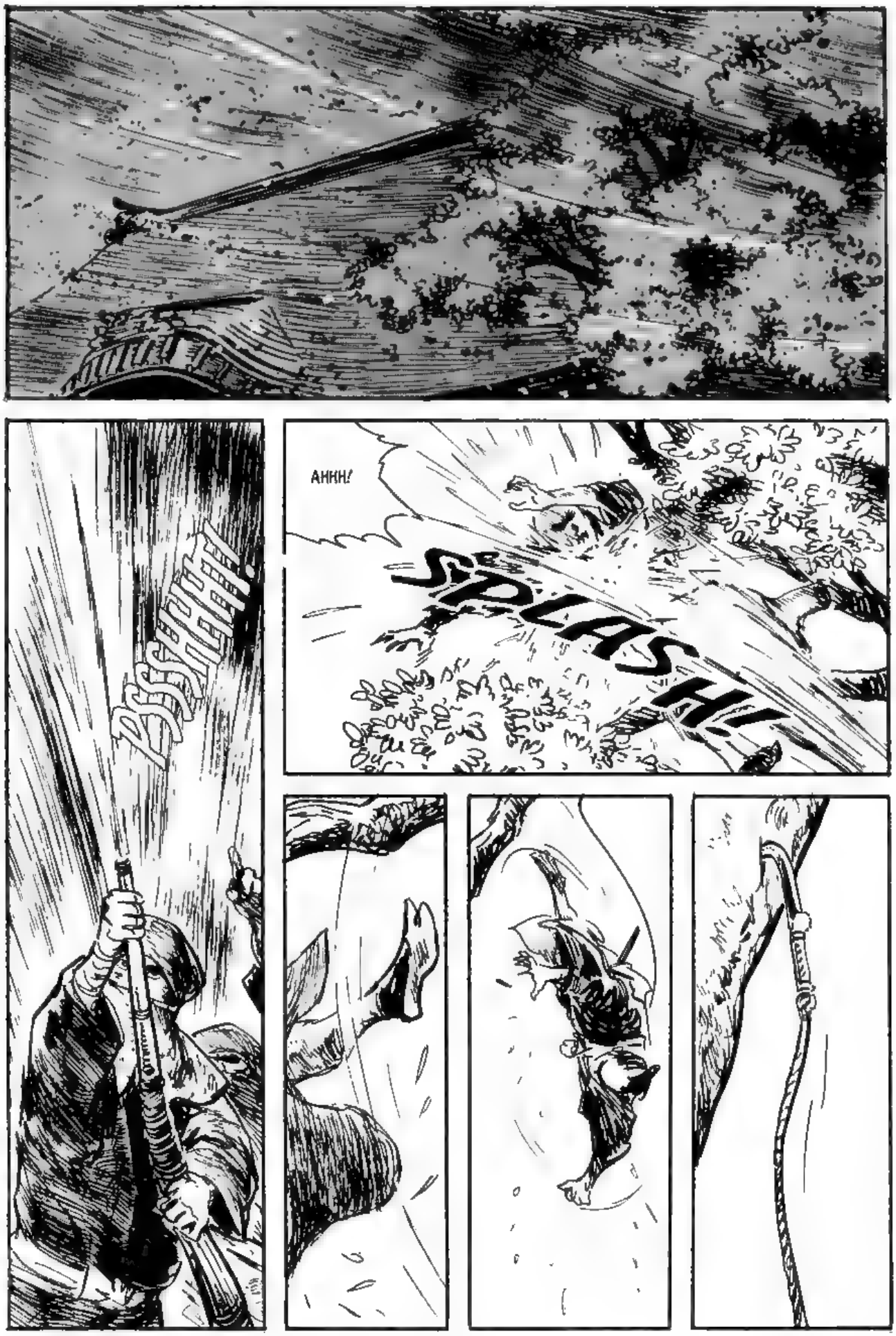







THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO.

THAT'S THE WAY REAL MEN PROTECT THE PEOPLE!
THEY DON'T JUST SHIELD THEM FROM THE RAIN... THEY EVEN SHIELD THEM FROM THE SPARKS. THAT'S WHAT MAKES THEM SO REMARKABLE...
WHAT IS MY SKILL COMPARED TO THEIRS?
PUTTING OUT FIRES... PROTECTING THE LIVES AND WEALTH OF THE PEOPLE!
MAYBE I SHOULD'VE BECOME A FIREMAN...


AHHH!
SPLASH!
PSSHHH!

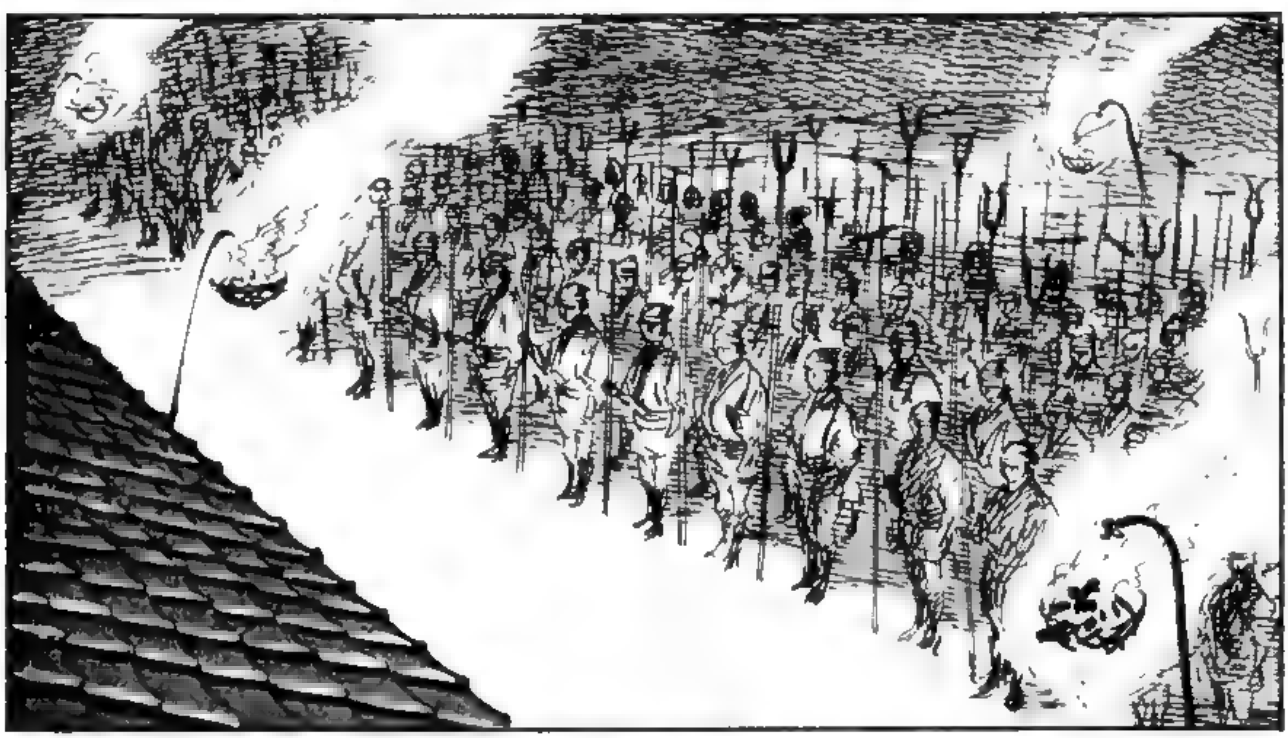
BWEENG!
HAH! ESCAPING IS WITHIN THE LIMITS OF MY TECHNIQUE!
NOW I GET IT!

WHEN SPARKS CAME FLYING...
WHEN WATER SPLASHED ON ME...
I DROPPED OUT OF THEIR WAY...

I COULDN'T HAVE PROTECTED MYSELF FROM THE SPARKS OR THE WATER IF I WERE STILL UP ON THE TREE.
IT WAS JUST LIKE HAVING AN OPPONENT SEE RIGHT THROUGH ME...
OF COURSE, IF I HAD FALLEN TO THE GROUND, I'D BE BRUISED ALL OVER.
BUT...
I'M OKAY NOW.
MY TECHNIQUE SAVED MY LIFE!

EVEN IF I DON'T USE IT *DIRECTLY* AGAINST MY OPPONENT, I CAN *STILL* USE IT *INDIRECTLY*.
THAT'S *IT*!
THIS IS WHAT HE MEANT BY ESCAPING WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF MY TECHNIQUE!
NOW I UNDERSTAND. BY DOING THIS, I CAN *BROADEN* THE RANGE OF MY TECHNIQUE.
MAYBE I CAN'T FLY AT MY OPPONENT, BUT I *CAN* ADAPT TO MY CIRCUMSTANCES. ESCAPING IS WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF MY TECHNIQUE...
THIS IS *SO* SIMPLE! WHY DIDN'T *I* THINK OF IT?
I MUST'VE BEEN THINKING *TOO HARD*. HA, HA!
CAN I DO IT?
CAN I BECOME A *JITTE* MAN SHIELDING THE LIVES OF THE PEOPLE FROM THE SPARKS OF EVIL?
HA, HA! AND I THOUGHT YAMADA-*SAMA* WAS SO *DUMB*! HA, HA!
HA, HA! HA, HA!

北町奉行所
OFFICE OF THE
NORTHERN TOWN
COMMISSIONER

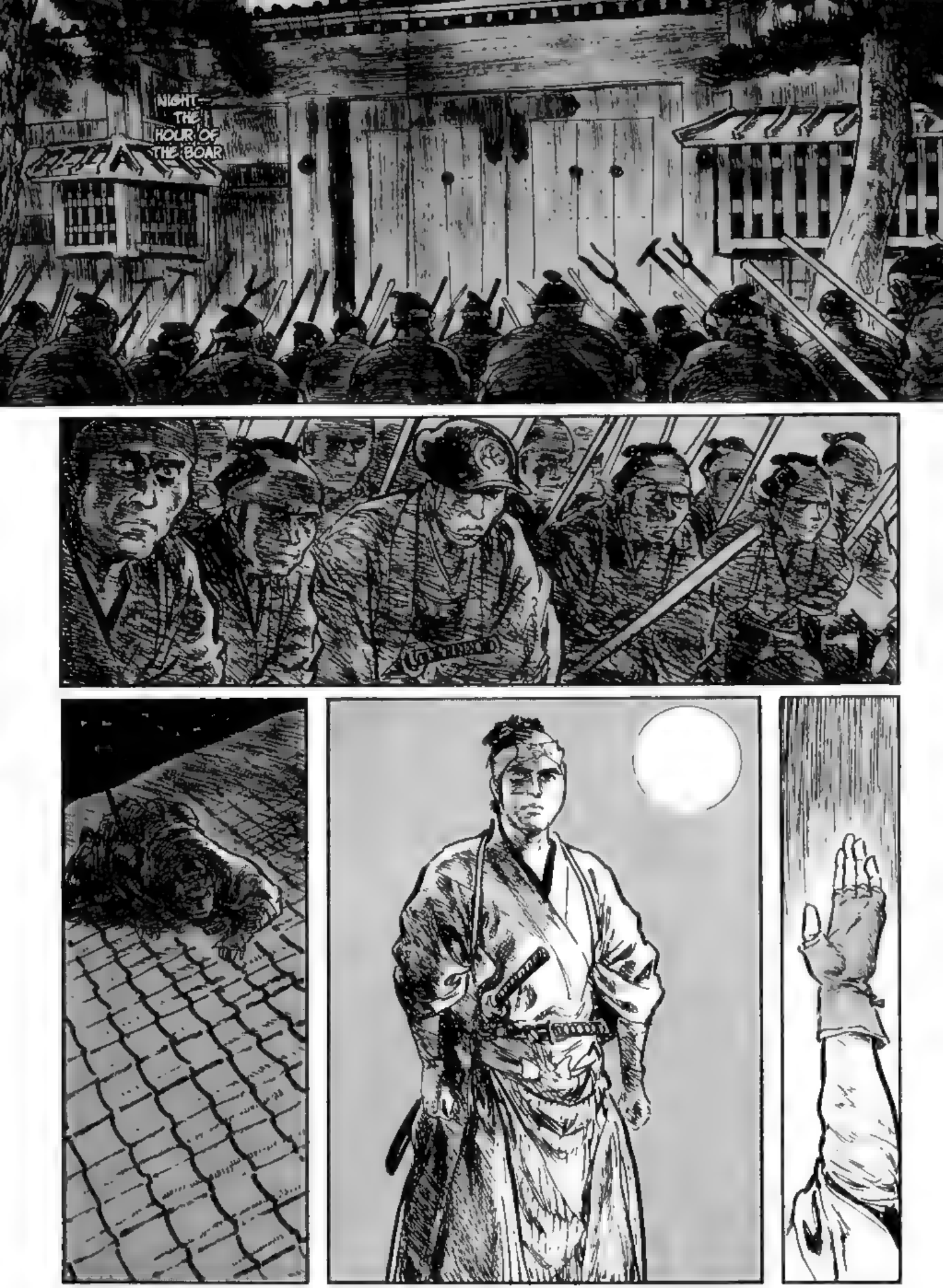


ALL RIGHT, WE'RE GOING AFTER *MARUBASHI CHOYA*, THE NUMBER ONE CROSS-SPEAR MAN OF THE HÔZÔ SCHOOL!
YOU *MUST* BE PREPARED FOR *INJURY* OR EVEN *DEATH*. IF YOU HAVE *ANY* PRIDE IN YOURSELVES AS SKILLED *JITTE* MEN, YOU MUST *NOT* LET HIM TAKE AWAY YOUR SPEARS!
WATCH OUT AND *DON'T* BE FOOLHARDY!

DOES ANYONE HAVE ANY IDEAS ABOUT HOW WE CAN PREVENT OUR SPEARS FROM BEING TAKEN FROM US?
MURAKAMI-SAMA!
WHAT IS IT, KASAJIRŌ?
WELL...

THIS YEAR, THE RONIN OF EDO, SURUGA, AND ŌSAKA CONSPIRED TO REVOLT...
ON THE 29TH DAY OF THE SEVENTH MONTH
御用
御用
御用
御用
A MASSIVE PLOT AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT WAS DISCOVERED

THEIR LEADER WAS MARUBASHI CHŌYA, A *RŌNIN* WHO MADE HIS LIVING AS A SPEAR INSTRUCTOR.
ON THIS DAY, THE NORTHERN TOWN COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE DISPATCHED *ALL* HIS MEN TO TAKE MARUBASHI DOWN.
THEY SURROUNDED HIS DOJO IN HONGŌ OCHANOMIZU.


NIGHT—
THE
HOUR OF
THE BOAR

御用
御用
御用
御用
御用
御用
御用
FIIIRE!
FIIIRE!
IT'S HORRIBLE! IT'S COMING CLOSER!

FWIP!
IT'S COMING CLOSER!
AAAH!
FWIP!
GASP!

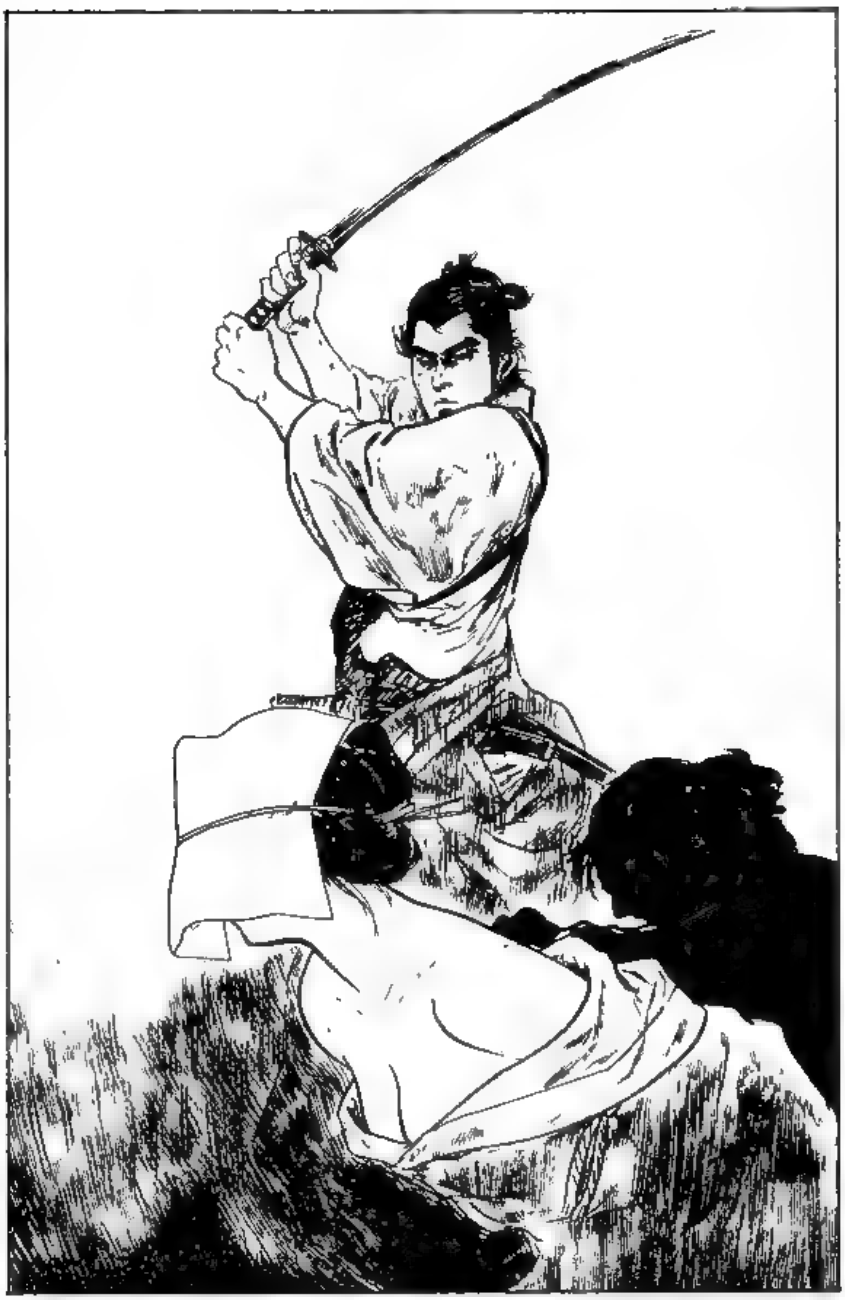
AHOOH
WHOOMP!

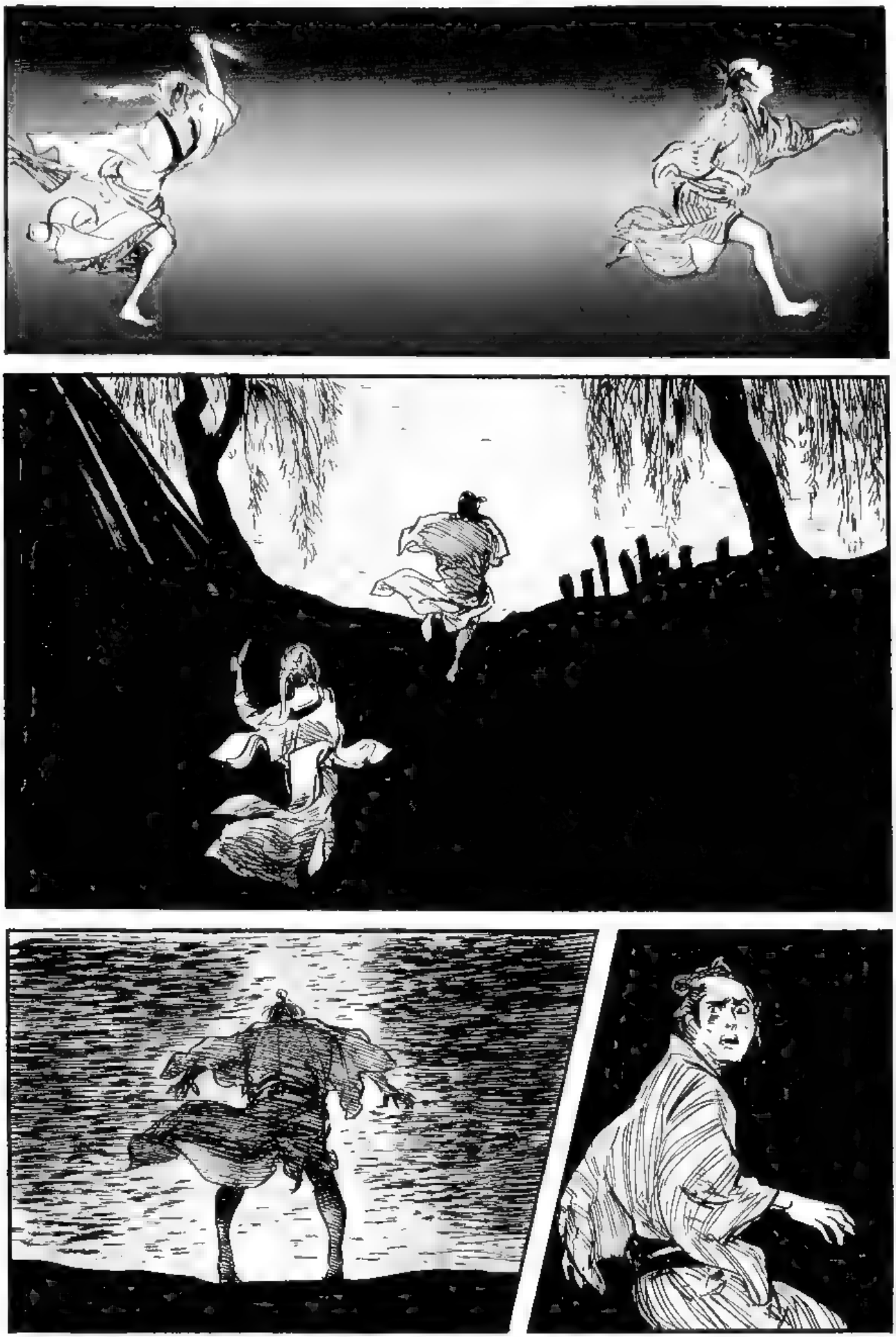
GOT HIM!

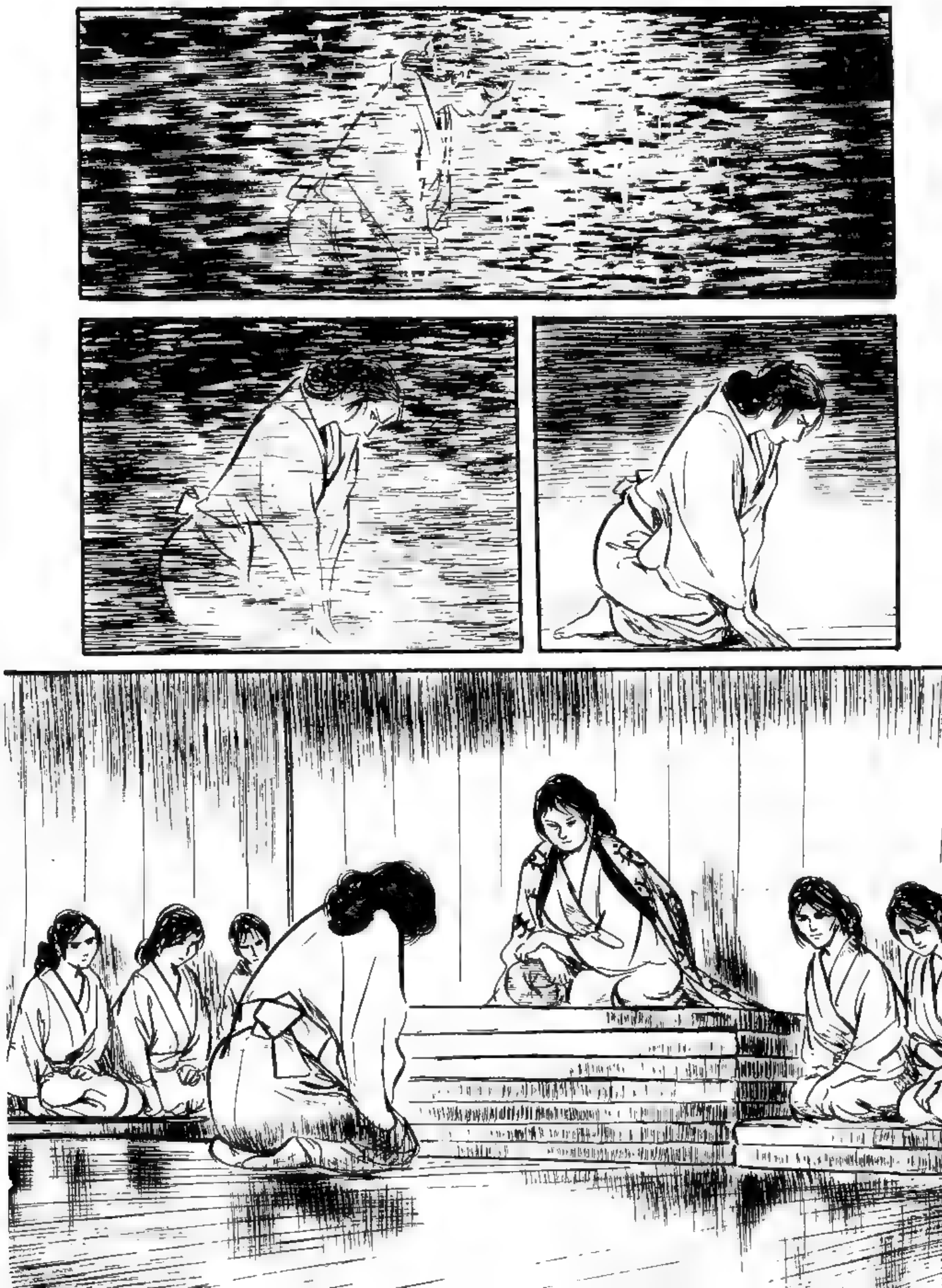
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I EVER GOT A COMMENDATION. I GOTTA SHOW THIS TO YAMADA-SAMA...
OOPS!
COMMENDATION FOR THE ARREST OF MARUBASHI CHŪYA. ON BEHALF OF NAITO, GOVERNOR OF SURUGA FOR THE CAPTURE OF MARUBASHI CHOYA CONSTABLE ITANE YAJIRO WILL RECEIVE EIGHT PIECES OF SILVER AND A WAKIZASHI.
--JUNIOR COUNCILOR KUZE, GOVERNOR OF YAMATO

the twenty-second

Life Link

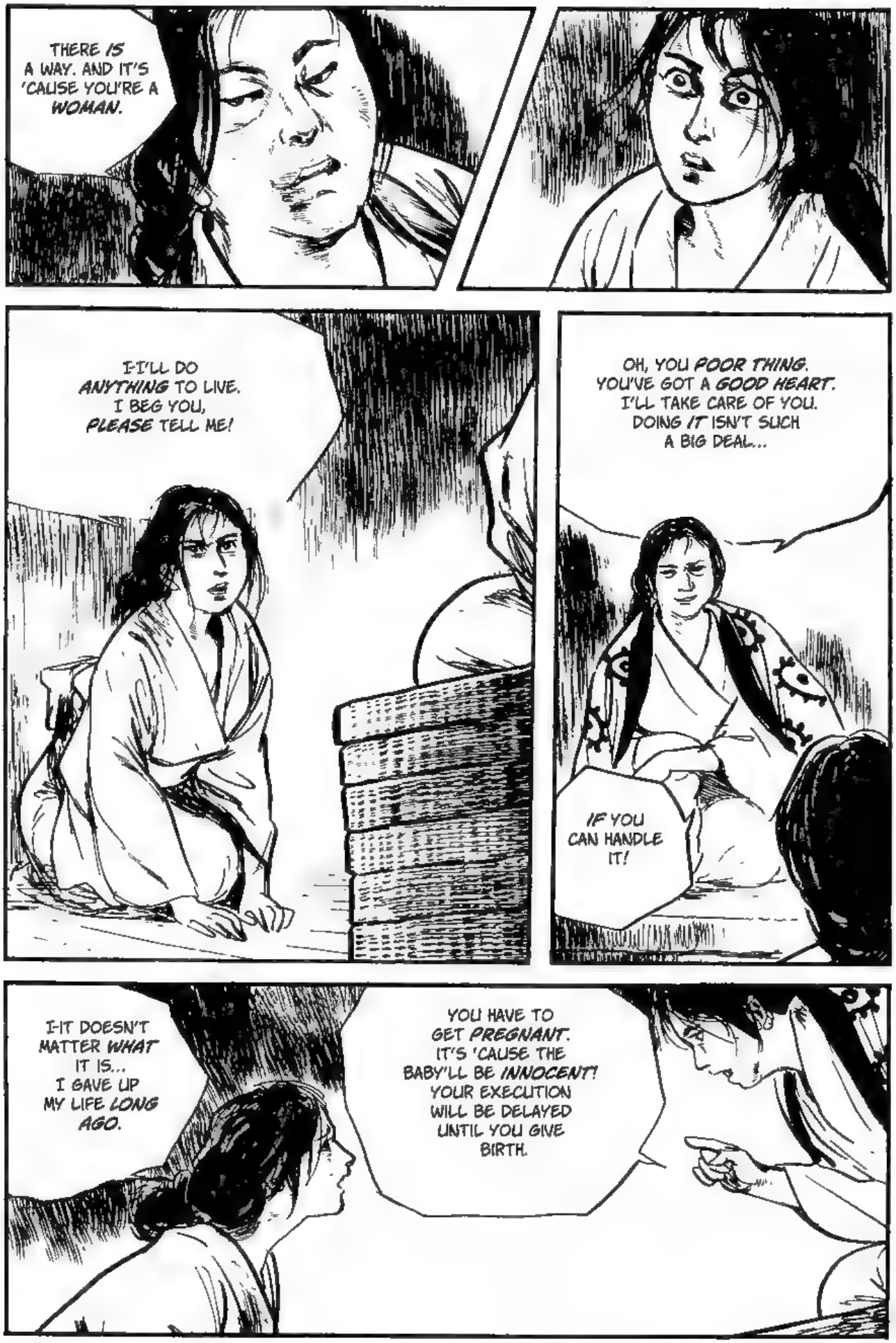






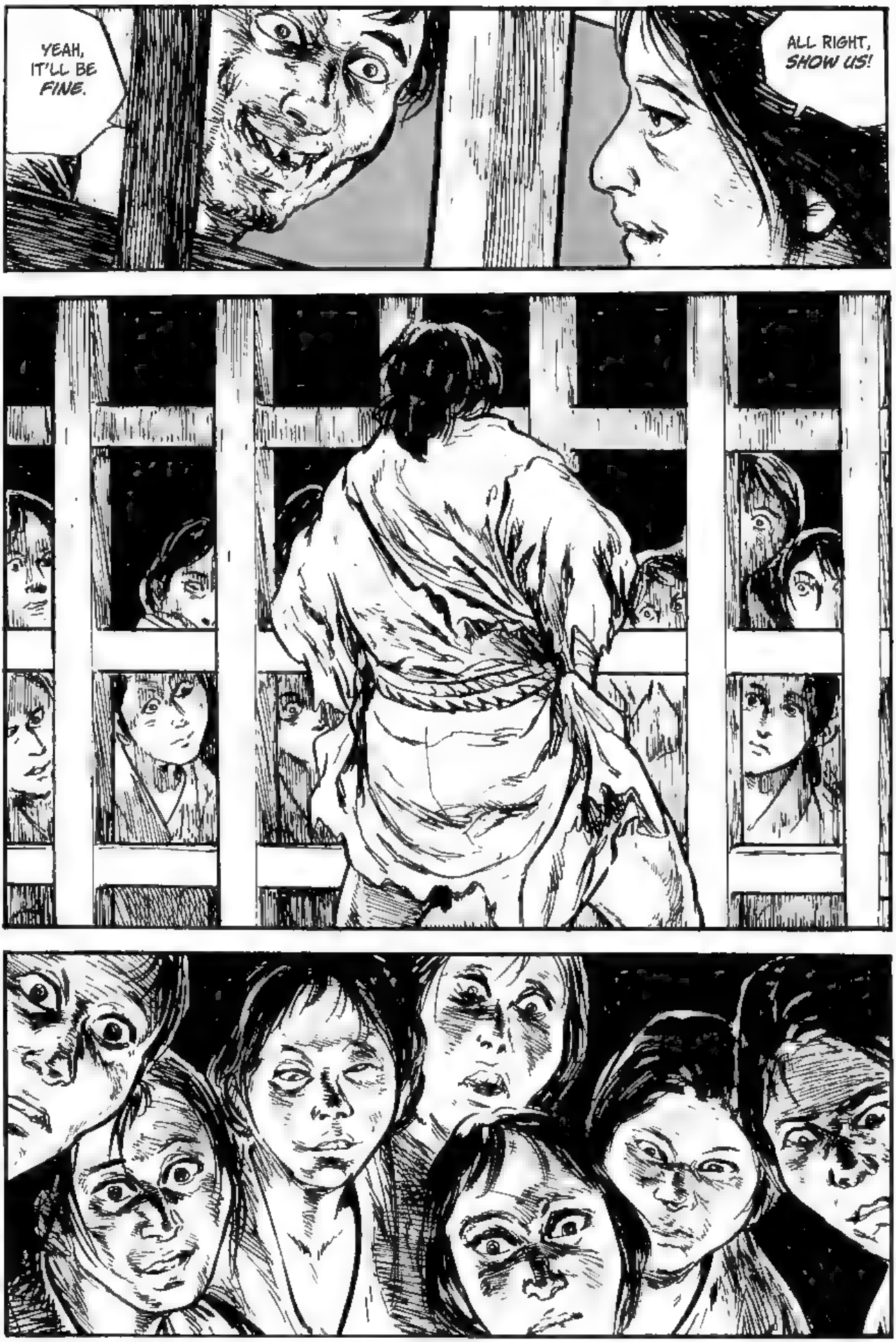
SO WHAT HAPPENED *NEXT*?
HE'S STILL *ALIVE*! I HEARD IT FROM THE JAILER BEFORE I GOT IN HERE.
THEY SAY HE'S GOT *TWO*, *THREE* MONTHS TO LIVE...
EVEN THOUGH YOU GOT HIM IN THE *CHEST*, HE'S *STILL* LINGERING ON! BUT IT'S GOING TO GET *HOTTER* FROM HERE ON!
ONCE HIS WOUND *FESTERS*, *NOTHING* CAN SAVE HIM!
YOU *GOT* WHAT YOU WANTED. ISN'T THAT ENOUGH?!
NO! NOT *AT ALL!*
I DON'T WANNA DIE BEFORE *HE* DOES!
I WANNA *LIVE* UNTIL I *KNOW* HE'S DEAD!
IF I *DON'T*... I...

AFTER ALL THE SUFFERING I WENT THROUGH TO PAY BACK THAT MAN'S DEBTS... GIVING UP EVERYTHING FOR HIM, BODY AND SOUL...HE ABANDONED ME TO MARRY THAT WOMAN!
IF... I DIE BEFORE HE DOES... I... I...
ONE OF YOU'S GONNA DIE FIRST.
YOU CAN'T MAKE HIM DIE.
THAT GUY'S GONNA DROP DEAD AROUND THEN!
YOUR INVESTIGATION WILL BE OVER-- AND YOU'LL LOSE YOUR HEAD IN THREE MONTHS!
HE GETS GOOD TREATMENT, HE MIGHT EVEN LIVE A LITTLE LONGER...
OH...OH, PLEASE! I-IF THERE'S A WAY I CAN HAVE MY EXECUTION DELAYED... P-PLEASE TELL ME!

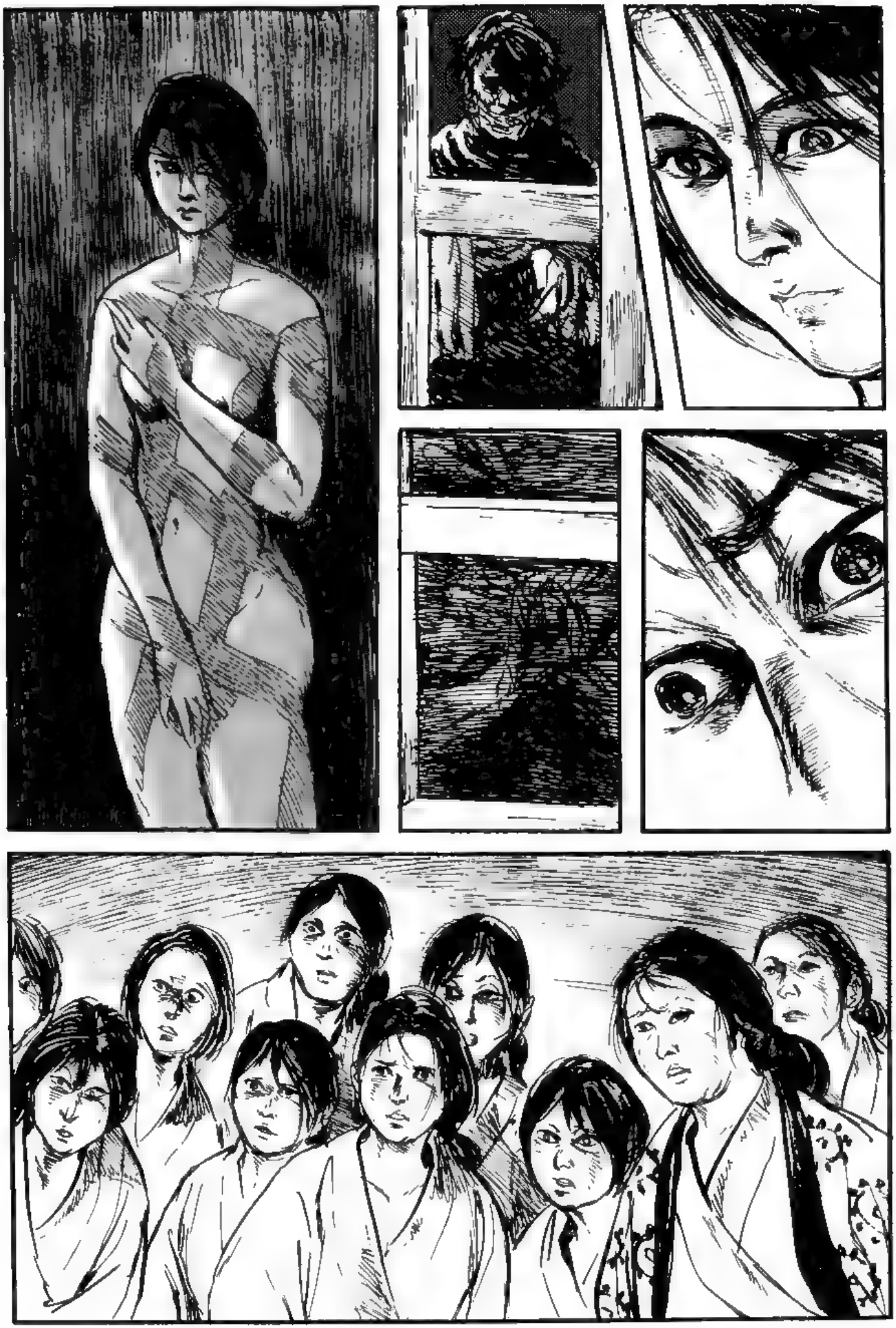

THERE *IS* A WAY. AND IT'S 'CAUSE YOU'RE A *WOMAN.*
I-I'LL DO *ANYTHING* TO LIVE. I BEG YOU, *PLEASE* TELL ME!
OH, YOU *POOR THING.* YOU'VE GOT A *GOOD HEART.* I'LL TAKE CARE OF YOU. DOING *IT* ISN'T SUCH A BIG DEAL...
IF YOU CAN HANDLE IT!
I-IT DOESN'T MATTER *WHAT* IT IS... I GAVE UP MY LIFE *LONG AGO.*
YOU HAVE TO GET *PREGNANT.* IT'S 'CAUSE THE BABY'LL BE *INNOCENT!* YOUR EXECUTION WILL BE DELAYED UNTIL YOU GIVE BIRTH.

WILL YOU TRY IT?
I-I'LL DO IT!
B-BUT... HOW WILL IT BE POSSIBLE... IN A WOMEN'S PRISON?
LET ME TAKE CARE OF THAT!
SET HER UP!
OKAY!

CAN YOU MAKE IT IN?

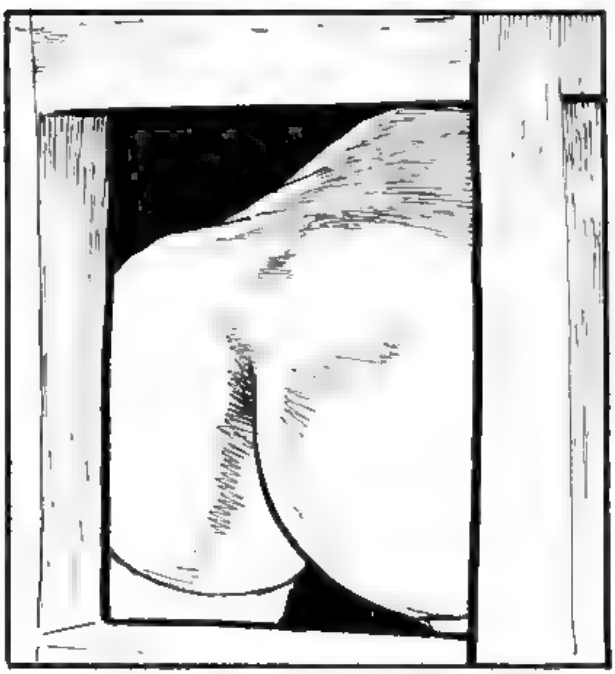

YEAH, IT'LL BE FINE.
ALL RIGHT, SHOW US!

HEE
HEE...



O-TOYO! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
Y-YEAH, I'M OKAY.
GIVE HER A HAND!

YOU'VE GOT A *LOT* OF GOOSEBUMPS. YOU SURE YOU'RE *REALLY* OKAY?
Y-YEAH!



HEE
HEE...
SPLPP
WHAP
C-CAN YA
MAKE IT
HIGHER?

IF YOU'RE GONNA GIVE UP, DO IT NOW!
N-NO.
FINE! DO IT!

AAAH!
UGH!
UMPH!
OKHH!
GSH
GSH
GSH
GSH

GSH
GSH
OHHH!
H!
H
G
H
AAAH

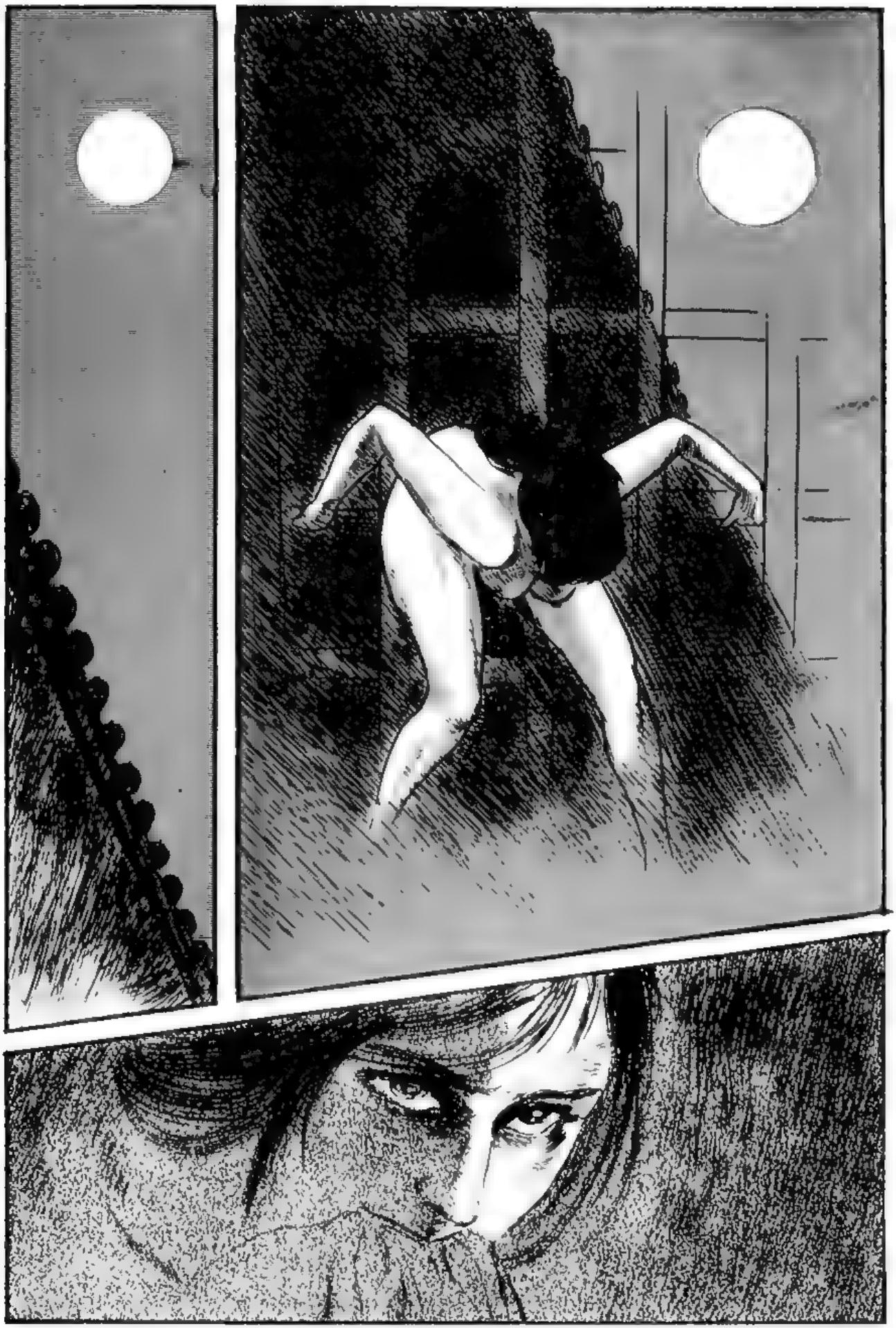
OHHH!
OHHH!
OHHH!
GSH
GSH

ABOUT TEN DAYS FROM NOW, THE GUARDS'LL *HASSLE* YOU *ONE AFTER THE OTHER!*
ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, YOU'VE GOTTA GET THAT *SEED* INSIDE OF YOU!

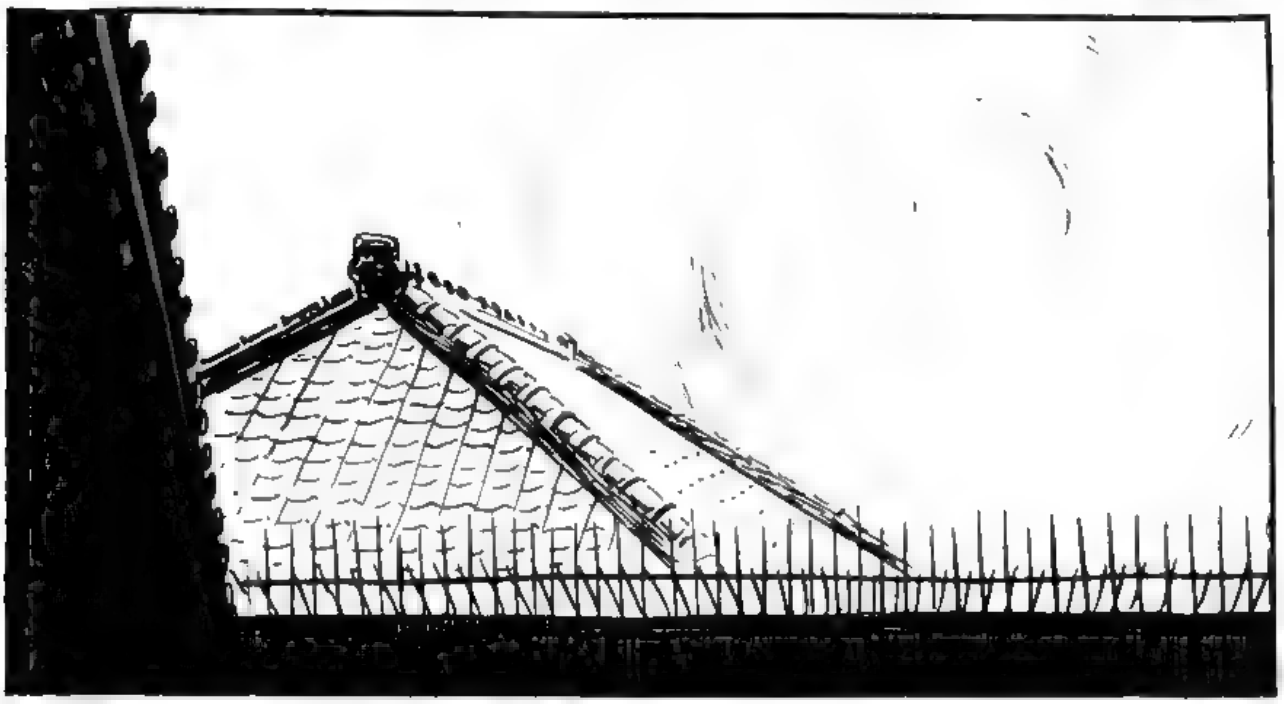
ARE YOU *UP* TO IT?!
Y-YES...

YOUR *HATRED* FOR HIM IS *SCARY.*

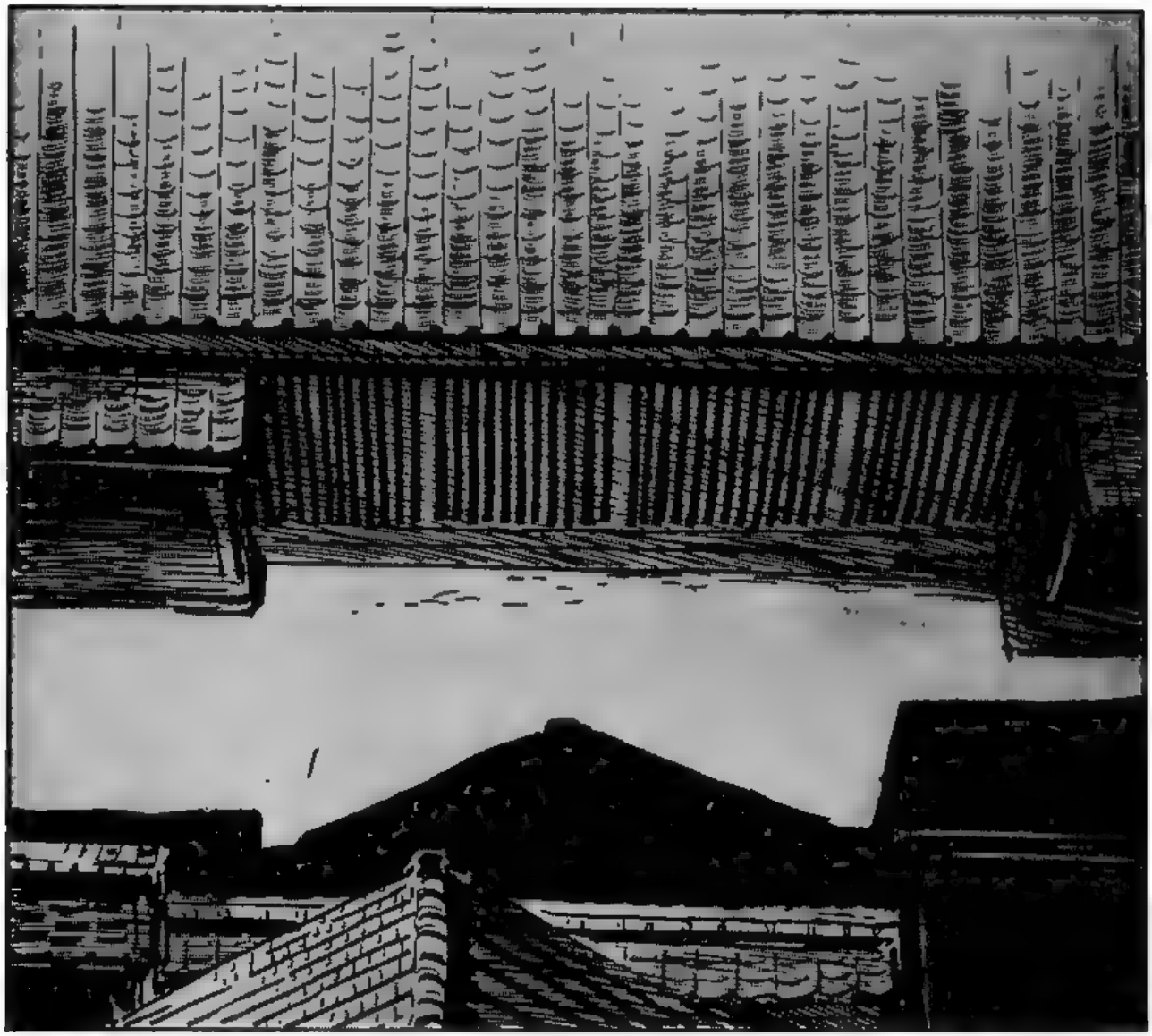
SHHH
SHHH
SHHH
SHHH

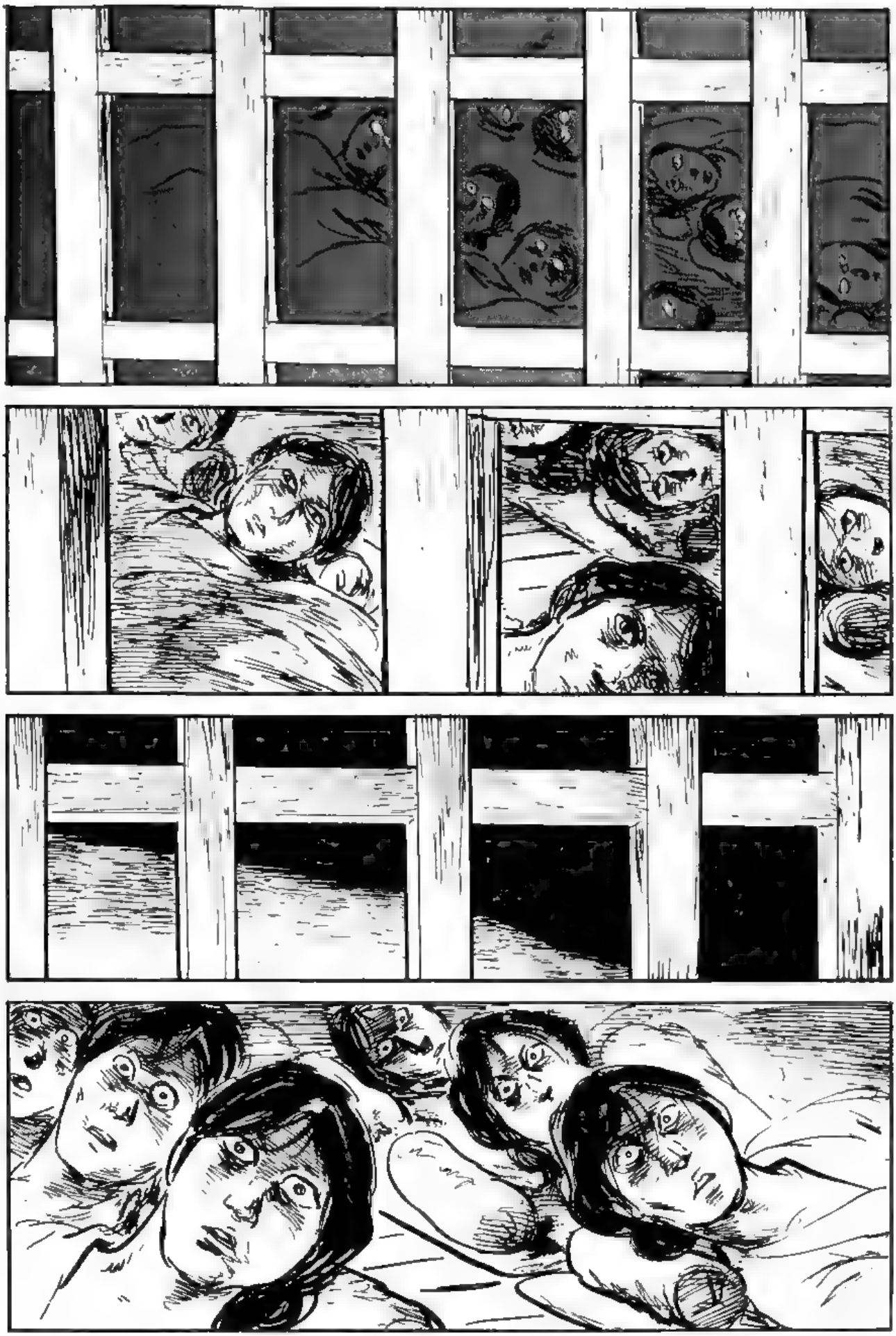


CHIRRRP
CHIRRRP



THREE MONTHS
LATER...





IT'S TOMORROW!
I-IT'S FINALLY TIME!
THE DAY HAS COME.

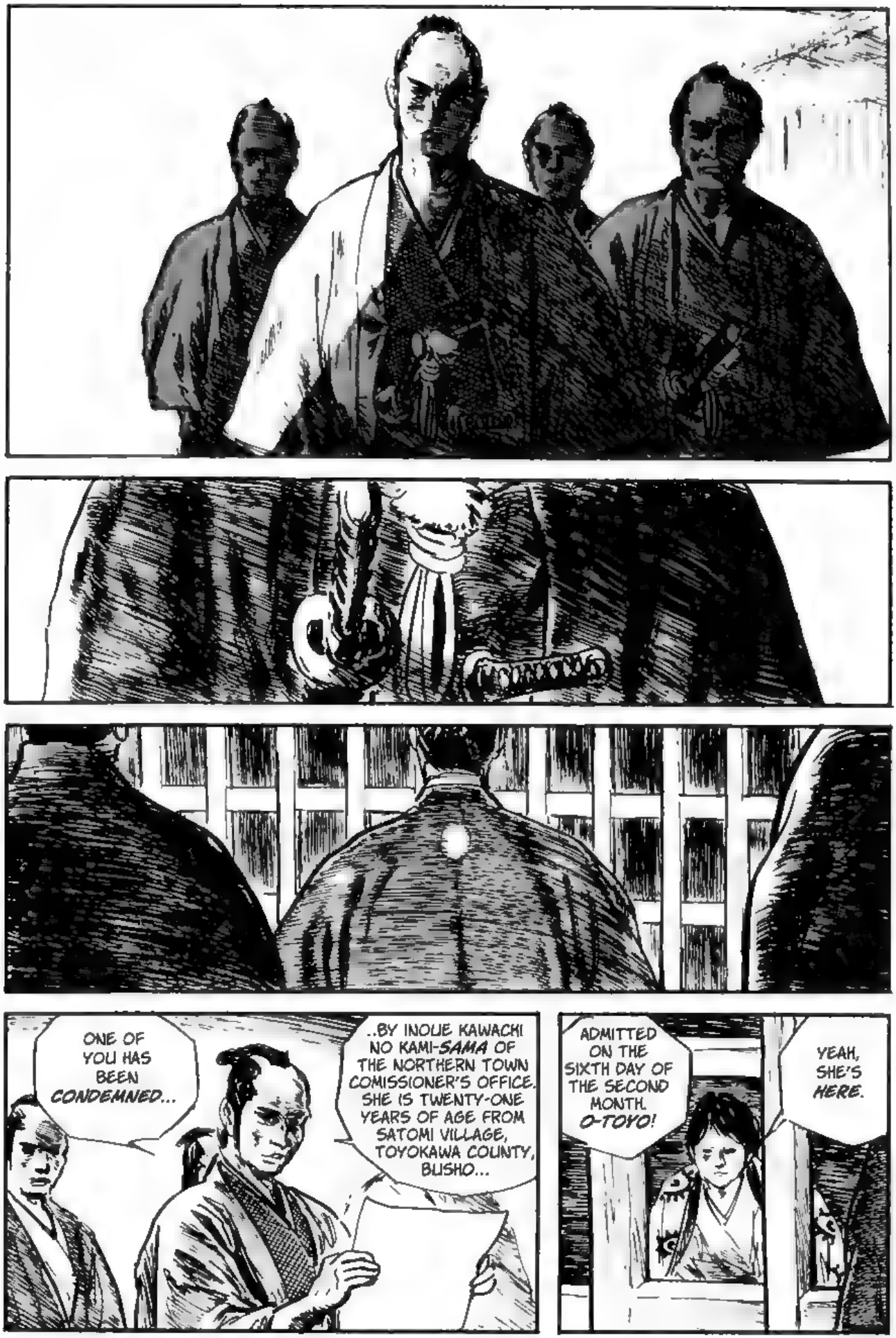
O-TOYO! IT'S TOMORROW!

BUT YOU'RE JUST IN TIME.
YOU'VE GOT YOUR BABY-- YOUR LIFE LINK.

AS LONG AS IT LIVES...
...I WON'T DIE!

IS *THAT MAN* STILL ALIVE?
NO WAY TO KNOW AT THE MOMENT.
BUT *DON'T WORRY.* ONCE THE EXECUTIONER KNOWS YOU'RE *PREGNANT*, YOU'LL BE *SPARED.*
BUT O-TOYO, YOU MUST *NOT* LET THE CONSTABLES OR *ANYONE* ELSE KNOW YOU'RE PREGNANT! ALL RIGHT?!
IF YOU DO, THEY'LL KNOW *YOUR* INTENTION, AND I WORRY THEY'LL HIT YOUR BELLY AND YOU'LL *LOSE* THE BABY.
YOU *HAVE* TO TELL THE EXECUTIONER YOURSELF. THERE IS *NO* OTHER WAY YOU CAN STAY ALIVE!

THANK YOU!
*TOYO
THERE'S NO MISTAKE.
IT'S TIME FOR HER TO GO.
ALL RIGHT, EVERYONE. YOU KNOW SHE'S GOING TO LIVE.
GET HER READY.


ONE OF YOU HAS BEEN CONDEMNED...
..BY INOUE KAWACHI NO KAMI-SAMA OF THE NORTHERN TOWN COMISSIONER'S OFFICE. SHE IS TWENTY-ONE YEARS OF AGE FROM SATOMI VILLAGE, TOYOKAWA COUNTY, BUSHO...
ADMITTED ON THE SIXTH DAY OF THE SECOND MONTH. O-TOYO!
YEAH, SHE'S HERE.

O-TOYO, ADMITTED TO PRISON ON THE SIXTH DAY OF THE SECOND MONTH, CONDEMNED BY INOUE KAWACHI NO KAMI-SAMA OF THE NORTHERN TOWN COMISSIONER'S OFFICE!
THERE IS NO OTHER WOMAN BY THAT NAME!
WHACK!
BRING HER OUT!
WHACK!
GO!
GO!
GO!
COME ON, GO!

DO YOU PRISONERS HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY TO HER?
YEAH!

YEAAAH!!

WHOSE JURISDICTION ARE YOU UNDER, AND WHEN WERE YOU ADMITTED TO PRISON?
I WAS ADMITTED TO PRISON ON THE SIXTH DAY OF THE SECOND MONTH UNDER THE NORTHERN COMISSIONER'S OFFICE.
LISTEN TO YOUR SENTENCE.
ELDER OKUBO KAGA NO KAMI HAS GIVEN THE ORDER FOR YOUR EXECUTION FOR THE CRIME OF MURDER.
TH-THANK YOU.
STAND UP!

YOU SCREWED UP.
I HEARD MATSUKICHI
DIED LAST NIGHT.

BSSST
THAT'S *RIGHT*!
HE *DIED* SQUIRMIN' IN *PAIN*! DON'T WORRY 'BOUT *HIM*.
BUT IT LOOKS LIKE *YOU* WENT TO ALL THAT TROUBLE TO GET YER BABY "LIFE LINK" FER *NOTHIN'*.

D--
...DEAD!
HE'S...
DEAD!

DEAD!
HE'S... DEAD!
HEE HEE
HE'S...
...DEAD...
HE'S... DEAD...

SPIT SPIT SPIT
I-I...
SENT HIM
TO HELL...

I SENT... HIM!
HA HA HA!
YOU SEEM TO BE SAYING SOMETHING. IF YOU HAVE ANY LAST WORDS, I'LL LISTEN.
TAKE OFF THE PAPER.
HA HA HA!
HA HA HA!
DON'T YOU HAVE ANY LAST WORDS?

HA HA HA...
I DON'T HAVE ANY LAST WORDS.
HA HA HA!
URGH!
URRRGH... UGH...
OOH...
BEEGHHH
UGH!
URGH!

RESTRAIN HER!
WH- WHAT...
...ARE YOU DOING?

ENOUGH!
ARE YOU *PREGNANT*?
WHAT IS THIS?! DO YOU WANT TO *SHAME* SOMEONE WHO'S ABOUT TO *DIE*?!
I'M *ASKING* YOU IF YOU'RE PREGNANT.
HA HA HA! HA HA HA!

DON'T JOKE WITH ME! I'M PREGNANT?!
HOW COULD I GET PREGNANT IN PRISON?!
TELL ME THE TRUTH! IF YOU ARE PREGNANT, YOUR EXECUTION CAN BE DELAYED UNTIL YOU GIVE BIRTH.
Y-YOU'RE KIDDING! I DON'T WANT TO LIVE ANY LONGER!
I WANT TO DIE FAST! I WANT TO GO TO HELL! THERE'S SO MUCH SCUM THERE I WANT TO SPIT ON!
SO HURRY UP AND JUST DO IT!
YOUR CHILD HAS COMMITTED NO CRIME!
YOU MAY BE ITS MOTHER, BUT YOU CANNOT TAKE ITS LIFE AS WELL AS YOURS.

I-I'M *NOT* PREGNANT! CUT OFF MY HEAD! *HURRY!*
THERE'S *NO* BABY INSIDE ME! IT'S *NOT* MY CHILD!
HURRY UP AND *KILL* ME!
URGH.. UGH..
BLEAHHH!
UGHHH!

IT'S NOT MY CHILD!
IT'S NOT MY CHILD!
UGGGH..
BLECHHH!
WH-WHO'D WANT TO GIVE BIRTH TO SUCH A DIRTY... DIRTY...
URGH... UGH...
GGGHKH...
WH-WHO'D...
WANT TO... WHO? URGH...
IT'S NOT MY CHILD!

UGHHH...
THUP
THUP
TH-
THIS...
THIS...
DIRTY
PIECE
OF...
THUP
THUP
THUP
IT'S D-DIRTY...
IT'S NOT MY
CHILD!
I AM NOT
PREGNANT!

NIJI MUJIN'I BOSATSU SOKU JO ZA KI, HEN DAN U KEN, GASSHO KO BUTSU NI, SA ZE GON:
<THE INEXHAUSTIBLE WILL BODHISATTVA THEN ROSE UP FROM HIS SEAT, BARED HIS RIGHT SHOULDER, PRESSED HIS PALMS TOGETHER, AND SAID THESE WORDS:>
"SESON KANZEON BOSATSU I GA INNEN MYO KANZEON"? BUTSU GO MUJINNI BOSATSU, "ZEN NANSHI NYAKU U MURYO, HYAKUSENMANOKU SHUJO JUSHO KUNO"?
<"WORLD-HONORED PERCEIVER OF THE WORLD'S SOUNDS, WHY ARE YOU CALLED THE PERCEIVER OF THE WORLD'S SOUNDS?" BUDDHA SAID TO THE INEXHAUSTIBLE WILL BODHISATTVA, "GOOD SIR, SUPPOSE THERE ARE INFINITE MULTITUDES OF LIVING BEINGS THAT ARE SUFFERING?">
"MON ZE KANZEON BOSATSU ISSHIN SHO MYO KANZEON BOSATSU SOKUJI KAN GO ONJO KAI TOKU GEDATSU."
<"IF THEY HEAR THIS PERCEIVER OF THE WORLD'S SOUNDS AND CALL HER NAME WITH ONE HEART, THEN SHE WILL PERCEIVE THEIR VOICES AND THEY WILL ALL BE FREED.">
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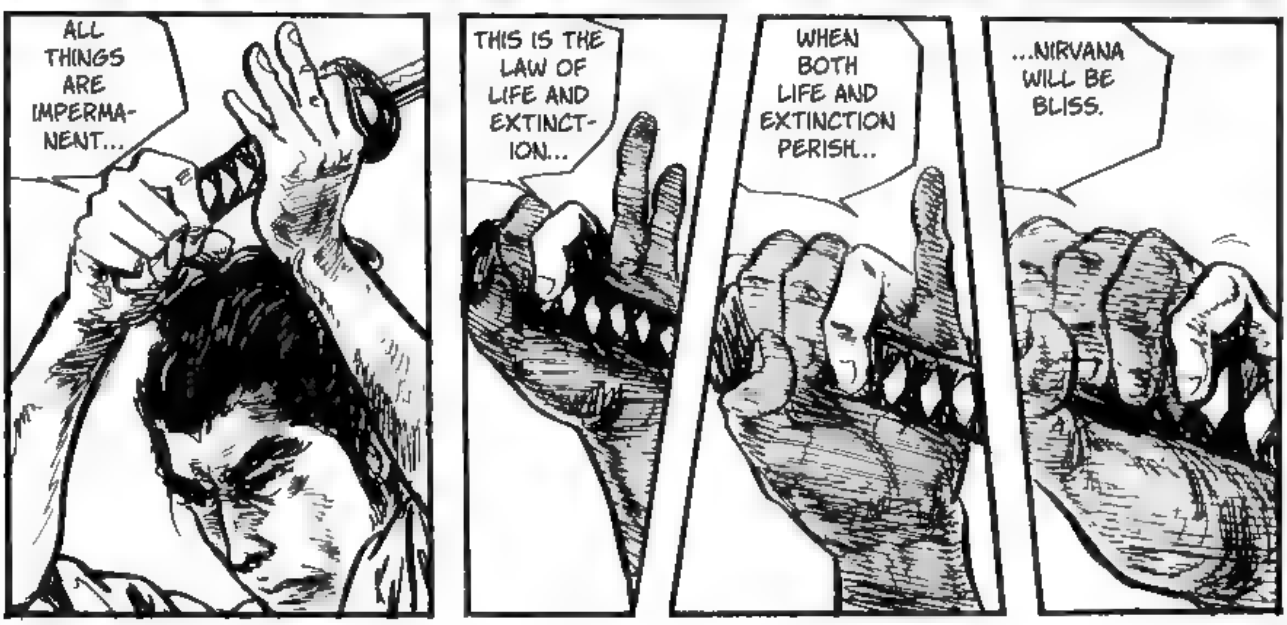
若有持是
觀世音菩薩
名者設大火
火不能燒由
是菩薩

若有女
水所
即得
百千
水金銀


ALL THINGS ARE IMPERMANENT...
THIS IS THE LAW OF LIFE AND EXTINCTION...
WHEN BOTH LIFE AND EXTINCTION PERISH...
...NIRVANA WILL BE BLISS.

FORGIVE ME!!
THUD

WHAT A PITIFUL CHILD... DENIED BIRTH BY ITS *OWN* MOTHER.
EVEN THOUGH IT EXTENDED *HER* LIFE...SHE TOOK *ITS* LIFE WITH HER *OWN* HANDS.
IN THE NAME OF THE BUDDHA...

GLOSSARY

ashigaru
Footsoldier.

bushi
A samurai. A member of the warrior class.

bushidō
The way of the warrior. Also known as *shidō*.

cho
Approximately 300 meters. Also, a section of a city.

daikan
An official who collected taxes owed to Edo and oversaw public works, agriculture, and other projects administered by the central government.

daikansho
The office of the *daikan*.

daimyō
A feudal lord.

hinoshita kaizan
"Opening the mountains beneath the sun." Said of an incomparable champion in sumo.

honorifics
Japan is a class and status society, and proper forms of address are critical. Common markers of respect are the prefixes *o* and *go*, and a wide range of suffixes. Some of the suffixes you will encounter in *Samurai Executioner*:

chan—for children, young women, and close friends
dono—archaic; used for higher-ranked or highly respected figures
san—the most common, used among equals or near-equals
sama—used for superiors
sensei—used for teachers, masters, respected entertainers, and politicians.

hour of the horse
Between 11 A.M. and 1 P.M.

ikisan
Samurai directly under the shōgun.

jitte
Bladeless weapon carried by policemen.

kasa
Umbrella

koku
A bale of rice.

kobushin-gumi
Samurai without appointments.

matta
Literally, "waited." A false start in sumo.

okappiki
Unofficial policemen who were former criminals

rōnin
A masterless samurai. Literally, "one adrift on the waves." Members of the samurai caste who have lost their masters through the dissolution of *han*, expulsion for misbehavior, or other reasons. Prohibited from working as farmers or merchants under the strict Confucian caste system imposed by the Tokugawa shōgunate, many impoverished *rōnin* became "hired guns" for whom the code of the samurai was nothing but empty words.

sekiwake
Junior champion sumo wrestler.

setta
A kind of sandal with a bamboo sole, a leather underside, and an iron heel.

suemonogiri
Cutting through a stationary object.

yokozuna
Grand champion sumo wrestler.

KAZUO KOIKE

Though widely respected as a powerful writer of graphic fiction, Kazuo Koike has spent a lifetime reaching beyond the bounds of the comics medium. Aside from co-creating and writing such classic manga as *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Crying Freeman*, Koike has hosted the popular *Shibi Golf Weekly* instructional television program; founded the *Albatross View* golf magazine; produced movies; written popular fiction, poetry, and screenplays; and mentored some of Japan's best manga talent.

Koike started the *Gekiga Sonjuku*, a college course aimed at helping talented writers and artists—such as *Ranma 1/2* creator Rumiko Takahashi—break into the comics field. His methods and teachings continue to influence new generations of manga creators, not to mention artists and writers around the world. Examples of Koike's influence range from the comics works of Frank Miller and Stan Sakai to the films of Quentin Tarantino.

The driving focus of Koike's narrative is character development, and his commitment to the character is clear: "Comics are carried by characters. If a character is well-created, the comic becomes a hit." Kazuo Koike's continued success in comics and literature has proven this philosophy true.

Kazuo Koike continues to work in the entertainment media to this very day, consistently diversifying his work and forging new paths across the rough roads of Edo-period history and the green swaths of today's golfing world.

GOSEKI KOJIMA

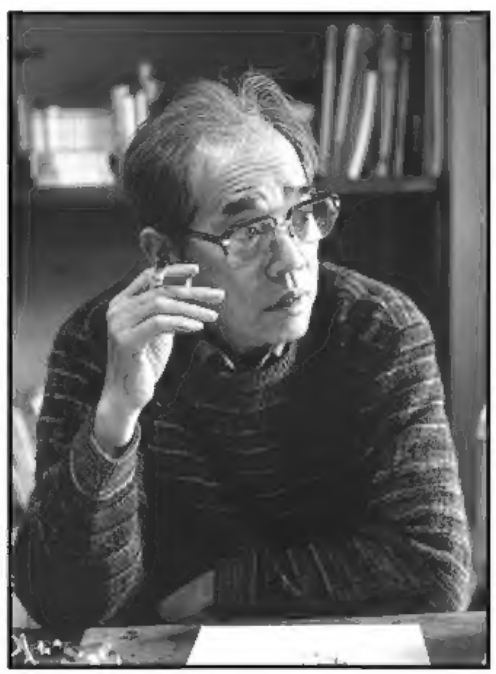
Goseki Kojima was born on November 3, 1928, the very same day as the godfather of Japanese comics, Osamu Tezuka. Art was a Kojima family tradition, his own father an amateur portrait artist and his great-great-grandfather a sculptor.

In 1950, Kojima moved to Tokyo, where the postwar devastation had given rise to special manga forms for audiences too poor to buy the new manga magazines just starting to reach the newsstands. Kojima created art for *kami-shibai*, or "paper-play" narrators, who would use manga story sheets to present narrated street plays, and later moved on to creating works for the *kashi-bon* market, bookstores that rented out books, magazines, and manga to mostly low-income readers.

In 1967, Kojima broke into the magazine market with his ninja adventure, *Dojinki*. As the manga magazine market grew and diversified, he turned out a steady stream of popular samurai manga series.

In 1970, in collaboration with Kazuo Koike, Kojima began the work that would seal his reputation, *Kozure Okami (Lone Wolf and Cub)*. Many additional series would follow, including this related series, *Samurai Executioner.*

In his final years, Kojima turned to creating original graphic novels based on the movies of his favorite director, the great Akira Kurosawa. Kojima passed away on January 5, 2000 at the age of 71.



Like a history lesson, art education, and pulp sensation all wrapped up in one series of fantastic books, *Samurai Executioner* pulls readers into a bygone Japanese era, one where the fear of the executioner kept crime at bay. One ronin samurai and his legendary sword sent chills into citizen spines...Asaemon, the decapitator and shogun's sword tester. But just his name couldn't keep crime at bay. Fighting crime required the skills of many.

In this volume we explore the daily duties of a few peculiar constables, men steeped in a tradition of crime fighting, and masters at their individual arts. Combined with Asa's terrifying blade, maybe criminals will think twice. And maybe not.

Published for the first time in America in the Japanese format.

Punished is not the man himself, but the evil that resides in him.

DARK HORSE MANGA

首斬り朝

FOR READERS 18+
FOR MATURE READERS